





MAKING GOOD IN THE
VILLAGE



MAKING GOOD IN THE VILLAGE

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CHAPTER I

HUNTING A JOB

THERE must be a job for me somewhere." The speaker was a young man of about seventeen, and he stood on the curb of Fifth Avenue at Twenty-third Street, gazing up at the broad side of the Flat Iron Building. He wore a gray suit, rather shiny at the elbows and just a trifle short in the sleeves and trouser legs. No doubt he had grown so rapidly the wear of the cloth had won in the race against his increasing size, and his ankles and wrists now protruded from a suit that had not worn out soon enough to make larger garments absolutely necessary. He was a wiry looking specimen of American boyhood, though he had not broadened out as he would surely do in a few more years.

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There was a look of wistfulness in his dark eyes as he repeated to himself, "There must be a job for me somewhere, and I'm going to get it if I have to call on every business concern in this city."

"What's dat yo' say, boss?"

Tom Stewart turned sharply to the questioner. He was unconscious of having expressed himself aloud. "Why, er, I was talking to myself. Who are you, anyway?"

"I'se a nigger, I reckon," placidly responded his questioner, and as Tom looked him over, he was impressed by the colored man's dignity of presence, his height and erect carriage. "I'se a regular, uneducated, self-respectin' nigger; I'se got a job, an' I hearn what yo' say an' I thought I mout hep yo' git work. Das what mek me say what I says. My name is Napoleon W. Ricketts."

"That's kind of you," Tom responded, "but I've been looking for work steady for a month. I started down at the Battery with a list of over two hundred names of concerns I wanted to work with, and I've only got four names left and no job."

"How yo' expect to work fo' two hundred businesses?" asked Napoleon.

"I only want one," said Tom with a laugh, "but

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I started with a list of two hundred to make sure of that one, only I didn't get that one, and I've just four names left."

"Fo' jobs is three too many," and the negro's broad smile disclosed two gleaming rows of very good teeth. "I specks I kin hep yo' jest as hard," he continued. "I got a boss what want folks as ain't afraid o' work, an' he most generally gives ebrybody what asks a chanct. Got any recommendations?"

"No, just out of high school," replied Tom.

"Yo' can't git no job wif no references, a dawg can't git sold or nothin' wifout a pedigree, dat's dawg references. Ain't yo' been nowhere?"

"Nope, only been to every place on the list from the Battery to Harlem and got a lot of requests to call again, and a lot more just said, 'Nothing doing.' "

"Dat's all yo' gits wifout references. I know a white pusson what writes references fo' ebrybody, he wrote my recommendation. It cost me two bits; yo' got a quarter wif yo'?"

"Yep, I got a quarter, but I need that for lunch."

"Dat's too much to spend fo' lunch. I'll show yo' where yo' kin git a course dinner fo' fifteen cents,

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den yo' gib me ten cents fo' a introduction to de boss an' if yo' lands a job, yo' gib me de odder fifteen cents at de end o' de week same like I writ yo' a recommendation."

"That's a bargain," said Tom with a laugh. "Where do you work and when shall I come round and get my introduction?"

"Yo' bettah be down to de stoah in de mornin' 'bout six I reckon. I'se janitor, an' yo' can hep me till de boss comes round. Dat's what."

"Where is the place?"

"Fort & Saxe Hardware Company, Fourth Avenue near Thirteenth Street. Yo' can't miss it."

"Here's ten cents for that introduction."

"Yo' ain't no business man."

"Why?"

"Cose yo' pay me befo' I gib yo' sumpin. Dat mighty poor tradin' when yo' pay fo' sumpin what yo' doan git."

"I'll trust you ten cents' worth," replied Tom.

"Yo' ain't got no call to trust nobody dese days, white or black, what yo' don't know. Come 'long wid me till I shows yo' dat fifteen-cent course dinner. Dat's wort sumpin, but doan yo' trust nobody dese days. I'se honest, but de next man—yo' watch out!"

HUNTING A JOB

A short walk south and then another east and Tom's guide stopped in front of a basement store. The house had once been the brown-stone dwelling of some wealthy New Yorker, but like so many others of its kind, it had surrendered to the swift uptown march of business. Two steps down brought one to the level of the restaurant floor, for what had once been a private dining-room for the aristocrat was now the very cheapest sort of lunch-room to be found in this neighborhood.

To one side, and over this depressed portion of pavement, sprang a brown-stone "stoop" or flight of steps. These with thin old ornamental iron railings and newel posts told of the old days of stately, if rather rigid style, a sort of old New York dignity not replaced by the great and over expensive mansions on Riverside Drive.

Tom's eyes saw it all, for though a citizen by birth, he was interested in the great changes going on around him in a city which occasionally sloughed off its old skin a good deal like a snake only to put on a new one and always a size larger. "Old brown-stone mansion one day, then a store and then they'll tear it down and put up a skyscraper. When they

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get old, wonder if they'll tear them down and put up something bigger?"

"Doan know, boss, but I specks me an' yo'll be gone to glory when dey starts in tearin' down some o' dese here big ones."

"Pretty busy in your restaurant here but I'll try it. I'll try anything once."

"Yo' sure goin' git yo' money back."

"You coming in?"

"No, I ain't got no fifteen cents to trow away. Yo' be at de stoah by six tomorrow mornin'."

"You bet! I want that job."

"Member I set stoah by yo' comin'. I want dat fifteen cents commission."

"You'll get it," replied Tom with a laugh as he turned into the restaurant. "Wonder if there's anything in it," he thought as the broad back of his new friend disappeared in the street throng.

CHAPTER II

THE NEW YORK GAME

IN a quiet street west of Seventh Avenue and below Twenty-third Street, on the third floor of a red brick house lived Tom's family. There were his mother, Mrs. Stewart, and his sister Mary, just fifteen, and the ever-present and constantly moving younger brother Guy, just about twelve. There was no father and that was no doubt the reason the furniture was scant and rather too well worn. It also accounted for several other things. It no doubt accounted for the anxious look on Mrs. Stewart's face; it may have developed Mary's gentle care and solicitude for her mother; it, no doubt, accounted for the fact that Tom, though a boy in years, was beginning to shoulder a man's burdens; it was also the reason he left the house at five-thirty in the morning to answer every advertisement that seemed to offer the hope of employment.

The evening of the day of Tom's notable meeting

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with Napoleon W. Ricketts found the little group patiently awaiting the return of "their man."

"He'll be here in a few minutes, Mother," came Mary's cheerful prophecy.

"Yep, he'll come all right, and I bet he gets a job, too. He's the stuff! I told that Jarvis bully if he tried to put anything over on me Tom would settle his hash. I won't stand for —"

"Here, here, Guy;" protested Mrs. Stewart, "what did I say about slang?"

"Said it meant I couldn't talk straight—no, you said it was because I didn't know enough real words."

"Yes, that's about right. If you had words enough to express your thoughts, you wouldn't have to use slang. Now, what's the penalty?"

"To say it over again straight," replied Guy, making what he called a "snoot."

"Well, then, say it."

"I forget what I was talking about."

"I'll help," said Mary. "You said, 'he'll come home all right, I bet—'"

"There he is now!" shouted Guy, as he ran to the head of the stairs. "Hello, Tom, that you?"

"Yes, Bub, been a good scout today?"

"Yep, ask Mother. Got ninety in spelling—"

THE NEW YORK GAME

"Tell me about it after dinner. Hello, Sis! There Mother, sit down, I'll wash and be ready in a minute."

"Got a job?" piped Guy.

"Well, I don't know; just you wait till we sit down to dinner and I'll tell you all about it."

A few minutes later, at the dinner-table, Tom told of his encounter with the cheerful Napoleon. "He left me at his fifteen-cent restaurant, and it was certainly great."

"What did they give you to eat?" asked the always hungry Guy.

"Bean soup, corned beef and beans or cabbage, sinkers and coffee and pie!"

"Great! What are sinkers?" asked Guy, hopeful of some startling revelation.

"Something that won't float," teased Tom.

"Don't help him to the use of slang," urged Mrs. Stewart. "We were just correcting his English when you came in."

"You saved my bacon. I had to translate slang into words they could understand, but you came along in time to mix 'em up so they forgot what they were scolding me for."

"I see I'll have to quit."

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"You better, it means you're short on words when you have to use slang," quoted Guy. "Tell us more about the restaurant. Did they give you anything else?"

"Wasn't that enough for fifteen cents? Worst thing about the place was the crowd. The man who sat on the stool next to me said he was so jammed in he couldn't tell what he was eating. Said he thought he was eating mutton stew but found out it was prunes. Said he was so crowded he was eating from his neighbor's fork, while what he thought he was putting into his own mouth, he was feeding to the fellow on his left."

"Ah—h!" drawled Guy derisively but appreciatively.

Mrs. Stewart was a splendid mother and a good manager, so now she turned the conversation as was her wont to something useful as well as interesting. "Shall we play the New York game tonight?" she asked.

"Fine! I'll get the map ready while you're clearing off the things," shouted Guy.

"Let me help. I'll wipe the dishes," said Tom.

"No, you must be tired out," replied Mrs. Stewart.

THE NEW YORK GAME

"Not I, I'm fresh as a daisy. I can eat work. Wish I had a job."

"Call on your friend, Napoleon, he'll help you," said Mary with a smile.

"I'm going to call, you can be sure. I won't miss anything that looks like a chance."

As soon as the dishes had been removed, Guy spread out on the dining-room table a large map of New York City showing all subway, surface and elevated lines as well as ferry and bridge connections east and west. When all had gathered around the table, Mrs. Stewart assumed charge. "Guy, you may ask the first question." Guy's eyes ran rapidly and excitedly over the map.

"Shortest way from Twenty-third Street and Third Avenue to Brooklyn Bridge?" he shouted.

"Elevated, of course," said Mary.

"No, walk over to Fourth Avenue, take subway to Fourteenth Street, change to express, no stop to the Bridge."

"I'd rather take the elevated," insisted Mary, "you wouldn't have to do so much walking."

"But you'd have to climb a long flight of stairs and my route would save at least ten minutes."

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"Guy wins on shortest time, which was the question. Now, Mary, your turn, think up a hard one."

"Well, here's one from actual experience. Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, West Side, to Long Island Railway Station, Brooklyn."

"I don't know much about those uptown connections," said Tom. "Guess Ninth Avenue Elevated to Chambers Street Station and walk across town to Brooklyn Bridge Terminal and take a surface car."

"Not at all," said Mary. "Take the subway, which is an elevated at One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, get on a Brooklyn Express and ride to the end of the line, Atlantic Avenue Station, and there you are, without a change."

"You win!" said Tom, "but that was your own question. Now try this—Forty-second Street Station to Lackawanna Railway in Hoboken, shortest and cheapest way?"

"I tried that once," said Mary.

"Forty-second Street car west, Sixth Avenue Elevated to Twenty-third Street, then Twenty-third Street crosstown to ferry," said Guy, slowly picking out the route on the map.

"That'd never do," said Tom. "Fifteen cents and only at the ferry."

THE NEW YORK GAME

"My way would be, Madison Avenue car to Twenty-third Street, transfer to crosstown line west on Twenty-third Street, to subway to Hoboken, cost twelve cents," said Mary.

"I can still save you money and do it in about the same time," said Tom. "Take subway express to Fulton Street, walk one block to Terminal Building, then subway to Hoboken, cost ten cents."

"You win on cost," said Mrs. Stewart, "but I'm not sure you save anything in time over Mary's route."

"It's a good game," said Tom, "it has helped me to find my way about town in great shape. I can direct people just like a policeman."

"That's why I'm playing the game," said Guy. "I'm going to be a policeman."

"I thought it was a fireman," laughed Mary.

"Ah—!" drawled Guy.

"It's the beginning of many a man's business life, being able to find his way around this big city. Your father told me about this New York game and I think he was wise about that as about other things. It's his insurance that supports us, now that he is gone. Oh, how I wish you children could have had that man with you till you were grown up!"

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"I'm going to be just like him," said Guy stoutly. Mrs. Stewart threw her arms about him rather suddenly, but the boy understood what was meant far better than some older people and he knew he had said the right thing.

The New York game was a great favorite, but after playing it a while longer the streets and avenues of a big city became dull, uninteresting black lines and all routes led to slumber station where each took the all-night express.

CHAPTER III

THE MESSENGER

TOM arose early next morning, but Mary had been ahead of him and there was a good hot breakfast waiting. "You're a good backer for a fellow," he remarked as he started for the door.

"This is my part of the plan. I'm your partner in keeping our family together. I do hope you find work today, mother is so anxious, the insurance money helps, but it is not enough."

"I know. I've just got to get work. Don't worry, I'll get it somehow." Tom spoke with conviction, but by the time he reached the hardware store of Fort & Saxe he began to realize how small a claim to consideration he had. "Nothing but the word of an easy-going negro who wants to make a quarter—bah! I'm foolish even to follow it up." Just the same he entered the door and looked about for Napoleon.

It was a well-ordered place with gleaming rows

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of hardware cabinets lining the walls, spotless cases of cutlery, electrical fixtures, bright novelties, locks, and tools of all sorts, but the variety of display was so great that Tom grasped but few details. The general impression given, however, was that of spotlessness and order. Way to the rear of the store he could see the back of someone at work with a broom. "It's Napoleon," he said to himself and he saluted that important person with a hearty "Good-morning."

"Dere! 'Clare to goodness, I knowed I done forgot sumpin' an' it was yo'. Yo' certainly must o' got up befo' breakfast dis mornin', it ain't scussly six now. Here, take dis year broom. Mistah Finch gits here at seven-thu'ty an' he better find yo' hard at work. Dere, yo' tell him yo' want to keep on workin'."

"I'll do it," said Tom.

"Now I'll tend to my other affairs," said Napoleon, "but yo' keep on sweepin' clear out to de front ob dis stoah."

What the "other affairs" were Tom had no way of knowing, but Napoleon disappeared and Tom was hard at work reaching under a low showcase with his broom when someone touched him on

THE MESSENGER

the shoulder and brought him to a standing position.

"Who are you?" came the short, hard inquiry.

"I'm Tom Stewart," gasped the newcomer.

"What you doing here? Who put you to work?"

"Mr. Ricketts."

"What! The lazy nigger! This is his job, there's nothing for you to do here."

"Oh, can't you give me something to do?" pleaded Tom. "I'll work for 'most nothing till I learn enough to be worth something."

"Sorry, but we got too much help now." Turning from Tom as though that matter were settled, he called, "Napoleon!" and when that dignified person appeared very promptly he asked sharply, "Where are the boys? If they can't get here on time there'll be a general house-cleaning."

"Conroy sent word last night he was sick," mumbled Napoleon, "an' de odders 'll be here directly, sah."

"I want somebody to deliver a package in Brooklyn this morning. Should have gone last night and there isn't a man on hand."

"Yo' is early, Mistah Finch; it's scussly seben; dey'll all be heah directly."

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"Yes, or ten minutes or fifteen minutes late, and I want somebody now. You better put on your hat, Nap, and for heaven's sake be quick. I've had trouble enough with this customer and don't want any more. I promised these goods for last night on a hurry-up order and of course they had to be side-tracked."

"Cose I'll go, Mistah Finch, but I suttently always does git lost in Brooklyn."

Tom had reluctantly put down his broom, but had lingered near unwilling to take no for an answer. He now approached Mr. Finch. "Give me the package," he said, "and I'll deliver it in jig time."

Mr. Finch turned and looked at him hard as though seeing him for the first time. "Here, take that bundle and report back to me as soon as possible. Here's twenty cents carfare and there'll be a quarter in it for you."

Tom picked up the bundle and started for the door. Once outside he read the address. "Why it's right near Atlantic Avenue Station!" he exclaimed. "That was one of the questions in our New York game last night. I'll make a record this time. He gave me twenty cents carfare. It'll only take ten."

THE MESSENGER

The bundle was heavy, as hardware bundles are apt to be, but Tom put it on his shoulder and ran a block north to the Fourteenth Street entrance to the subway.

He left behind him a much-surprised man in the person of Mr. Finch. That person looked at the spot where the bundle had lain, then at the door through which Tom had disappeared and then he followed his messenger through the door to see the last of him turning the corner on a run.

"Now, what do you think o' that?" he muttered to himself. "He never said, 'Where is it?' 'How do you get there?' 'Is there any answer?' And he actually ran! Maybe he'll steal the bundle? I don't know anything about him. Here, Napoleon! Who was that boy you brought in this morning?"

"I doan know, sah, he sho looked 'spectable."

"Well, if he doesn't deliver that bundle, I'll hold you responsible."

"Law, I hope to goodness he comes back, ten cents ain't goin' to cover no such loss as dat!"

"What do you mean by that?" asked Mr. Finch sharply.

"I'se, I'se tryin' to get de poor boy a job, das all."

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"So you're charging him ten cents for helping him."

"Dat ain't all, Mr. Finch."

"Please explain."

Mr. Napoleon W. Ricketts was having a hard time of it and the more he tried to explain, the more involved he became. Meanwhile Tom had caught an express and had already crossed under the river and was nearing the Atlantic Avenue Terminal. Once out, he rushed to a policeman who stood guard at the street crossing and asked his direction.

"Wan block over an' two to yer right," explained that authority with a wave of the hand, and then, when Tom had run half a block, he elevated his chin for long range work and bellowed, "What's yer hurry?" Then lowering his mouthpiece for close range practice he added, "The bye's crazy or a new hand, or maybe he stole it. It ain't natural fer a messenger boy to run."

Just about this time Mr. Finch had also come to the conclusion that there was something queer with a messenger who asked no questions but simply took the bundle and ran. "I'll call Holt & Dart and see if he has arrived." Taking down the receiver Mr. Finch got his number promptly, "Holt &

THE MESSENGER

Dart?" "Has our messenger arrived with that lot of brass fixtures?" "Been and gone?" "Yep, we try to keep our promises. Good-by." Mr. Finch put down the receiver. "Beats all," he said meditatively, and a few minutes later Tom arrived, handed in the receipt signed by Holt & Dart together with ten cents change.

"Here's your quarter, young man, and you've earned it."

"I don't want that quarter, I want a job," and Tom looked the superintendent in the eye. There was a moment's pause. "Where did you work last?" asked Mr. Finch.

"Nowhere, just out of high school."

"We don't like to break in green help."

"Try me a week and pay me if I earn anything. If I don't, then don't pay me. I got to make a start somewhere."

"How did you know the shortest way to Holt & Dart?" inquired Mr. Finch suddenly, and then Tom had to tell all about the New York game.

"Good idea, that," said Mr. Finch. "I'll try you one week at three dollars. You'll run errands."

"Here Frank, what time did you get in this morning?"

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Frank was one of the errand-boys and he now came forward with lowered eyes. "A little after seven-thirty, sir, but I'm usually on time."

"Let me see your time card for last week."

In a few minutes Frank returned and handed Mr. Finch the card. "Late every morning but one. Go to the cashier and get what's due you. Now, Tom Stewart, here's your chance to make good."

"Thank you, sir," said Tom, but it made him sick at heart to see the other fellow lose.

CHAPTER IV

A SIX O'CLOCK START

THE store Tom returned to was quite different in some respects from the one he had left. The hardware and fixtures had remained the same but there was a lady cashier rapidly preparing her cash for the day, there were five salesmen and three boys including the boy Frank who had just been discharged. There was also a tall, square-jawed man, walking the center aisle whom Tom quickly learned was Mr. Fort, or "the boss."

"When do you want to start in?" asked Mr. Finch.

"Why, I was here at six this morning. I guess I'm already started."

"Looks like it," said Mr. Finch with a smile, "but seven-thirty is soon enough and you'll find it will pay you to be prompt. Look around between errands and get familiar with our stock and prices. Here, take this catalogue along with you, and here's our discount sheet. What you don't understand about

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ask me or one of the salesmen. Errands will be your main hold for some time to come. By the way, keep up that New York game. We need that sort of information a dozen times a day. Here, Mr. Phelps," and Mr. Finch beckoned to the nearest salesman, "this is Tom Stewart, our new errand-boy. Keep your eye on him and break him into our ways of doing things."

"All right, Mr. Finch. Come with me, young man, there's always plenty to do in this shop."

Tom's first business day was so well filled that he was fairly surprised when six o'clock came round and he and the other boys and men commenced cleaning up preparatory to going home. The big gong at the rear of the store struck three sharp notes at just five minutes before six to notify the force that clean-up time had arrived. Tom had been so interested in everything that he had not noticed the lack of cordiality of the two other boys, Mike and Fritz, nor had he appreciated the animus behind several petty acts of interference, but now there was no mistaking Mike's ugly mood when he said, "Frank's layin' fer you. You will steal his job, will you? You better look out, comin' around here runnin' with bundles and bringin' back carfare to get solid with the super.

A SIX O'CLOCK START

Oh, we're onto you! You ain't goin' to last long here."

Tom was surprised but said nothing. He had been able to take care of himself in a New York City school and had no fear of Frank, but he did realize the fact that these young fellows disliked his methods of winning his way as it necessarily brought their own slovenly work into unpleasant contrast, and he feared these two would make all the trouble for him they could.

It was at the crowded corner of Fourteenth Street and Fourth Avenue a little later that somebody tripped him up from behind as another young tough delivered a smashing blow just over Tom's left ear. The suddenness of the attack sent him sprawling into the middle of the street where he was immediately seized by the traffic policeman.

"Phwat ye doin' fightin' on a crowded corner. I'll learn ye to create a disturbance on my beat. Stand where ye be till I sind fer the hurry-up wagon."

"But, officer, somebody hit me. I was not fighting."

"Thin I arrest ye for sprawlin' all over the street an' delayin' traffic. I know ye boys an' I'm tired o' yer pranks."

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"Look here, officer, I got a mother and two children I got to help support and I just got my first job today. If you arrest me, they'll feel awful about it."

"None o' that. Ye ain't married—an' two children. Go on wid ye! I've a mind to let ye go fer the nerve o' ye."

"It's no joke. It's my mother and sister and brother and I just got my first day's work after hunting for a job for a month. I'll lose my job and the folks at home'll be crazy till they hear from me."

"Are ye lyin', kid?" and there was a change in the voice of this autocrat.

"No, I'm not and I didn't do a thing either, somebody hit me and somebody else tripped me up."

"That's not likely. Who'd be doin' that if ye was mindin' yer own business?"

"I think it might have been the boy who got fired today when I got my job."

"Ah, ha! that's easy understood. Now beat it while your shoes are good an' don't let me catch ye ag'in."

Tom was thankful to get out of the scrape so easily and as he walked rapidly homeward, he was sure he saw his new enemy, Frank, disappear down a side street. "That was a dirty mean attack,"

A SIX O'CLOCK START

thought Tom, "I'll have to keep a good look out for a while, but he can't keep that sort of thing up forever. It was his fault he lost his job, not mine."

When Tom mounted the stairs to his little home he was so full of enthusiasm over his successful day that he quite forgot that he had been knocked down and rolled over in the middle of the street and that his appearance had suffered accordingly. "Got a job," he announced the minute he reached the top of the stairs, "and I'm going to keep it, too," he added.

"What is it, coal heaver on a barge?" asked Mary with a twinkle in her eye at Tom's dirty appearance. His mother was more concerned and immediately inquired, "What's happened to you, have you been hurt?"

"Not a bit, just got knocked over and rolled around in the middle of the road. Forgot all about it till you mentioned it," replied Tom, and then he had to report in detail everything that had happened from the time he took that bundle to Brooklyn.

"Why, it's our New York game that got you the place," said Mary.

"Surest thing you know. And now here's something else I've got to study," and Tom pulled out of his pocket the catalogue Mr. Finch had given him.

MAKING GOOD IN THE VILLAGE

"Can't we make a game out of that, too?" queried Guy.

"Not a bad idea. We'll take fire-extinguishers, sporting goods, cutlery, agricultural hardware, carpenters' tools and some of the other main lines and see who can quote prices and discounts from the names, sizes and numbers," suggested Tom.

"I don't like that game. It's too much like arithmetic. I'd rather play the New York game," said Guy, who foresaw much work.

"I'm afraid it won't be much of a game to you folks, but I'm going to get those prices and discounts right no matter how much time it takes."

"I'll help," said his mother.

"Me, too," chimed in Mary with her cheerful smile.

CHAPTER V

TRICKS

WHILE Tom's job was to run errands, he was determined to learn everything there was to learn about the business and with this in mind he offered any spare time he might have between trips to the several salesmen. They used him to straighten out a show-case after some troublesome customer had fumbled over the entire display in order to select a cheap knife, or they had him stay after hours to help prepare the show-windows for the morrow. He made himself useful and made up in a measure for lack of knowledge by willingness to serve. It was the second week of his stay that he had another encounter with the discharged Frank.

It was toward evening and Tom was returning from an errand, carrying a bulky bundle labeled "Fragile," when a sudden push from behind sent him stumbling forward and it was the merest chance that saved his bundle from complete wreckage. In fall-

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ing he tumbled squarely against a young man who happened to be in the right spot at the right time for Tom. This enabled Tom to regain his balance, but the severe jolt did not put the powerfully built fellow he had fallen against in any very amiable frame of mind. It was here that Frank made a serious mistake, for as he turned to run, he laughed at Tom's discomfiture and called out, "Next time I'll get you sure, you scab!"

The young man who had acted as buffer for Tom's fragile load sized up the situation accurately and, passing Tom at a bound, caught Frank in a vice-like grip and shook him till his teeth rattled. "You cowardly little rat! Attack a man from behind and then run, will you? Guess that'll keep you good for a while," and giving him an extra shake, he dropped the whimpering culprit in a heap and passed on.

Tom waited for Frank to get up, then he said, "I'm not responsible for your being fired. I got my job fair and square and I'm going to keep it. What's more, I can take care of myself, and if you keep on with your tricks, I'll give you the worst licking you ever had in your life. If you want to fight, be a man about it, don't try any more of your cowardly tricks. Better look for another job, you'll never get mine."

TRICKS

"I'll get square with you yet," whimpered Frank as he slowly moved off. The little crowd which had gathered laughed and melted away and Tom continued on his errand with his fragile bundle, thankful there had been no general smash-up.

Mr. Fort was an unknown quantity to Tom. The man talked but little and the other errand-boys, Mike and Fritz, maintained he knew nothing about what was going on. These two had somewhat changed their attitude toward Tom by the end of his first month with Fort & Saxe.

"Look here," said Mike one morning before the arrival of Mr. Finch, "What's the use of spoilin' a good thing, the boss don't know what's goin' on. All your quick work runnin' errands and handin' back carfare ain't goin' to do you no good. Nobody knows you done it. Better have a little fun on the side."

"I don't know much about the boss," replied Tom, "he hardly ever speaks to me, but I want to get ahead, and I don't know any other way than the way I'm doing."

"We had it easy here till you came an' we made more money, too," said Fritz. "I most always walked and saved carfare. Say, if you will join us,

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we'll put you wise to a new scheme to beat the time clock. I punches for Mike an' he punches for me accordin' to who's late. We had duplicate keys made."

"I've got a better scheme for beating the time clock than that," said Tom, without showing the trace of a smile.

"What is it?" came from both boys.

"Why, get here before seven-thirty in the morning."

"You're a sissy," said Mike contemptuously.

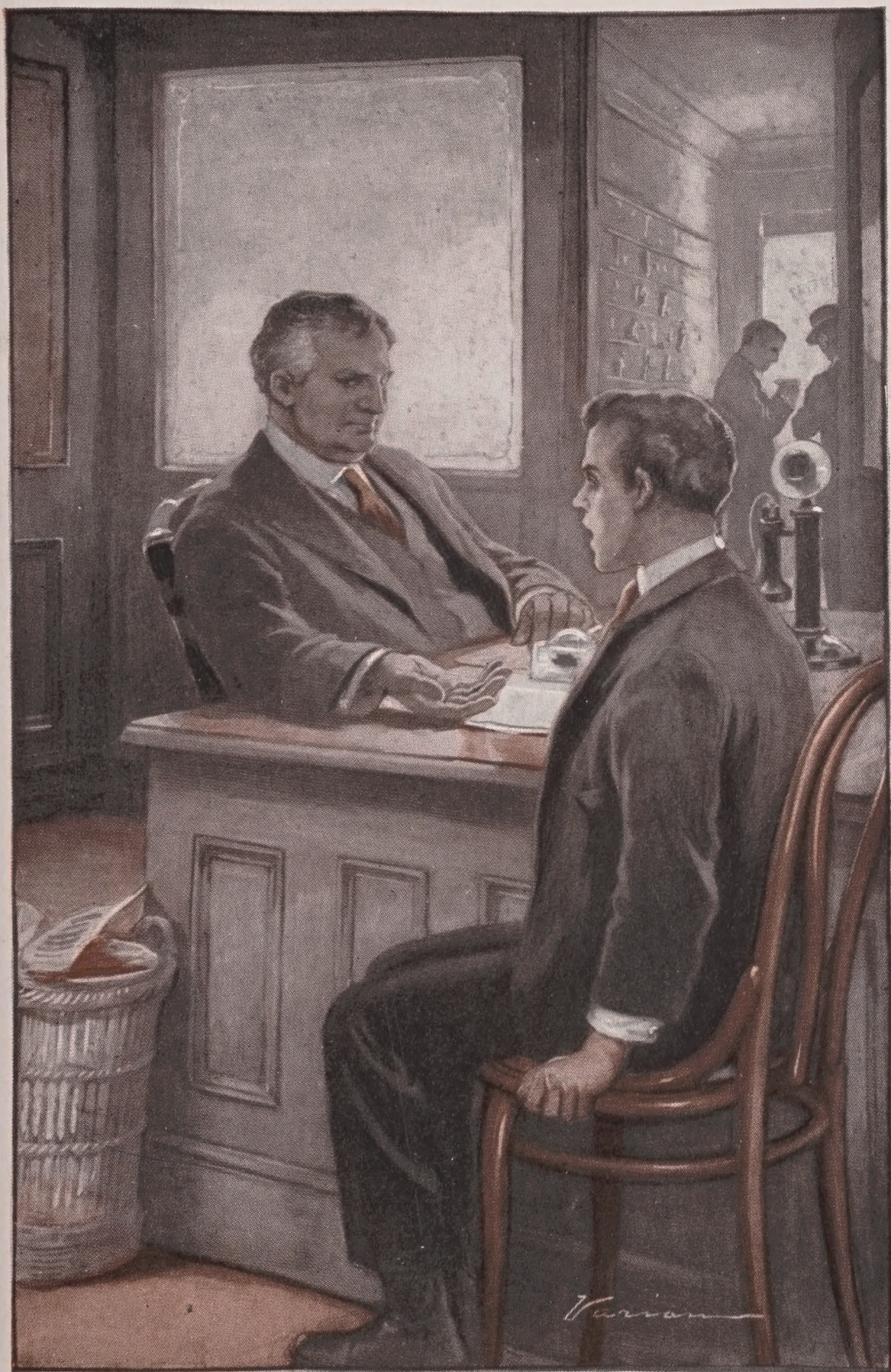
"An' I suppose first thing you'll do now will be to tell on us an' we'll get fired. They'll raise your wages a dollar a week," said Fritz with scorn.

"No, I won't say a word, but if I were you, I'd chuck those extra keys. You'd get fired quick enough if it was ever found out that you had duplicates."

"You're no sport or you'd join us," complained Mike.

"You're spoiling a good thing and acting like an old woman," sneered Fritz, though it was evident both boys were weakening.

"I know one thing, Frank got fired for being late and your tricks are not on the square and won't land



“‘Will you please hand me the duplicate keys to our time clock?’”

TRICKS

you anywhere. I want to be assistant superintendent some day."

"That's good coming from the new errand-boy at three per," laughed Mike.

"A fellow might have a chance if the boss was wise to how good he was, but he never sees anythin'."

"Well, I'll take my chances playing the game the way I've started and you can do as you please. Now I don't want to have to say anything about those duplicate keys, so I think you better hand them over to me."

Both boys protested but both produced the offending keys and reluctantly handed them to Tom. "So long as I know you haven't got these keys I won't feel that I ought to say anything," said Tom, and he wondered that these two fellows both older than himself should relinquish the keys to him with so little protest. He did not yet realize how very weak a thing is a guilty conscience. There was yet another surprise waiting for Tom that day. It was about four-thirty in the afternoon when he received word that he was wanted in the office. This had a rather ominous sound, and when Tom found himself actually ushered into the presence of the boss, he became truly concerned. This state of mind was not

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improved by the opening sentences of Mr. Fort.

"You've been with us now about a month?"

"Yes, sir."

"You had no references."

"No, sir."

"Will you please hand me the duplicate keys to our time clock?"

"Yes, sir," and Tom in anguish of mind laid the two accusing keys on Mr. Fort's desk. He had given his word to say nothing if the keys were turned over to him so he sat there, his face burning and his heart in despair. It seemed hours before the boss spoke and to his surprise the voice was kindly. "I like your way of beating the time clock better than some other ways I've heard of. Your wages will be five dollars a week and when you earn more you will get more."

Tom fairly choked and strange questions rose in his mind, "Could this be the hard boss? How did he know about those keys? Was this the man who didn't know what was going on?"

"I'm so glad you didn't think I had anything to do with those keys and I thank you for the raise," he managed to say.

"Tom, you've made a fair start, now study your

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stock, understand the system, learn how to sell, start a bank account. Don't be afraid to start small, that doesn't matter, but it does matter how you grow. Begin as small as you like but see to it that you grow. Today must be better than yesterday and tomorrow a little bit better still. There's a lecture for you. I'm watching you."

Tom stumbled out of the office too happy to talk and longing to get home to tell the folks all about his good fortune. He was striving to reconcile this strange man who seemed to know everything with the boss who never saw anything and didn't know what was going on.

CHAPTER VI

A NEW FRIEND

LET'S celebrate," said Mary when she had heard the details concerning Tom's raise in salary.

"Better wait until I get my first extra money before we spend it," said Tom cautiously. His responsibility as the man of the house was making him think more and more of the steps in the road which lead to success.

"You are right, Tom, but you have been applying yourself so hard lately, early in the morning and late at night, that I think a little spree would do you good. It need cost very little," said his mother.

"How about movies?" inquired Guy.

"That's not a bad idea at all if we select one of the good ones," replied Mrs. Stewart.

"I want to see something with galloping horses, diving and swimming and a clown!" shouted Guy.

"Just you wait a minute, you're not the one who needs a change," said Mary with a smile.

A NEW FRIEND

"I can stand a change any minute," retorted Guy defiantly.

"Let's look at the advertisements and pick out one we'll all like," suggested Mrs. Stewart.

"Here's a big show all about what the Government is doing. Submarines and battleships, flying-machines, coast defenses, printing money, military camps and West Point soldiers, all the departments at Washington and a great list besides. It takes the whole evening to see it," said Tom.

"That would suit me," said Mary.

"Any horses in it?" asked Guy.

"Yep, U. S. Cavalry."

"Any clowns?"

"You'll be there. You'll do for the clown," said Mary.

"Ah—h!" said Guy.

"There'll be fun in it, there always is in movies," said Tom encouragingly.

"Then that's settled," said Mrs. Stewart, "we'll go and see what Uncle Sam is doing."

The next day, Friday, found Tom at the store as usual, and as it happened there was no errand for him to run, he was at work with Mr. Phelps and Napoleon opening a new consignment of high-grade

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cutlery, razors, knives and scissors. During this labor Mr. Phelps was called to the front of the store to wait on one of those customers who thinks he gets no service unless always from the same salesman. This left Napoleon working over the cases with Tom. Presently the negro desisted from his labors and slowly drawing himself up to his full height and assuming a sort of depressed dignity said, "Mistah Tom Stewart, yo knows as how I'se always been reasonable poor, I was born widout a nickel an' I still has it, I knowed yo' in yo' less prosperous days an' rememberin' as I do a certain financial transaction dere was between us I recalls dat dere is fifteen cents still comin' to me."

"That's so," answered Tom in surprise, "but I offered it to you and you said you couldn't take it because Mr. Finch told you not to."

"Das all right, but Mr. Finch done forgot about all dat by dis time an' fifteen cents comin' at dis juncture ob mah career would tend to amel—, to amel—,"

"Ameliorate," prompted Tom.

"Thanks, ameliorate my present disorganized financial condition."

A NEW FRIEND

"It's worth the money," said Tom, handing over the fifteen cents.

"What's wort de money?"

"Ameliorate," said Tom soberly.

"It's a good one, ain't it?" replied Napoleon with pardonable pride.

Just here there came to the ears of the two workers a faint, far-off, smothered whimper. "Who's dat?" asked Napoleon, glancing around apprehensively.

The rear of the store opened on a little court or paved area that was all there was left of what had been a comfortable back yard when in the old days a house instead of a store had occupied the premises.

"I hears it goin' again," continued Napoleon as the faint noise came once more to their ears. "Sounds like a baby whimperin'. It certainly wouldn't be spirits in broad daylight."

"No, nor at any other time," said Tom with a laugh.

"Dere it is ag'in an' makin' a noise like splashin'. I'se beginnin' to think sumpin' queer is happenin'."

"Let's look around and see where the noise comes from. It isn't under these shelves."

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"No, worst part of it is, de noise is comin' from nowhar' onless it's out doors," whispered Napoleon.

"Well, then, let's look around out in the yard. There it goes again, whining like a dog and splashing. Pretty queer, all right," said Tom.

The little paved court was just exactly what it had always been, nothing but a short back yard with a high board fence at the rear and on both sides. Still, as the sound persisted and seemed to come from over or under the rear fence, Tom proceeded with the help of Napoleon, who gave him a hand and shoulder, to scale that obstruction. Once astride the top Tom's glance discovered what appeared to be the cover to an old well or cistern situated just the other side of the fence. He immediately dropped into the adjoining yard. Investigation showed that the cover to this old cistern was but carelessly adjusted and that the noise they had been listening to came through an opening large enough to have permitted the passage of a man's body.

The stone slab which was the cover was too heavy for Tom to move unaided so he knelt down and peered anxiously into the black opening. He could see nothing, for the place was as black as the pit and when he brought his face to the opening he shut

A NEW FRIEND

out what little light there was. However, he could hear a steady, tired splash, splash, splash, accompanied by an occasional pleading whine.

"It's a dog!" Tom exclaimed. "How on earth did he get there?"

As he raised his head from the black opening, he saw the head and shoulders of Napoleon rising over the fence. "I'se got a ladder. Who is it?"

"It's a dog, fallen into a well."

"Who'd a thought there'd be a well lyin' around out dere?"

"Never mind how it got there, we've got to get that dog. You go to the plumbers' supplies, section twenty-one, third tier, and bring me a weighted candle-holder with a candle in it. Bring a plumb-line, same section, lowest right-hand drawer. Bring matches, and hurry!" Tom could have given prices and discounts on the articles mentioned, but that would not have helped in the present instance. While Napoleon was gone Tom scaled the fence and procured a double skein of window-cord and making a slip-knot stood ready with his lasso when Napoleon returned.

"Now, Nap, lower away your light and we'll see who's in bathing."

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Down went the tiny flickering light and Tom with his face to the hole could see the damp, moss-grown walls of the old cistern, while from below came the patient splash, splash of the tired swimmer.

"Bet he's nearly all in. Wonder how long he's been in there."

For answer there came a short, sharp, hopeful bark and as the candle went lower and lower, Tom caught glimpses of the inky black water, ever so far down, and presently with the light but little above the surface he could make out the head and flashing eyes of a very much used-up dog.

"Hold the light where it is," Tom instructed Napoleon, "there, that's about right. Wonder what I can do with a lasso?"

It was difficult to manipulate that stiff sash-cord, but Tom finally worked it over the dog's head, and as the poor beast paddled about, he struck one paw through the loop. Tom immediately drew the cord which brought it firmly over the dog's neck and shoulder. "I've got him!" shouted Tom. "Now give me a hand and we'll haul him out in a jiffy! My, he's heavy!"

"Heavy as a pusson," commented Napoleon.

Another moment and a fine specimen of English

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bulldog was trying in every way known to the dog people to tell Tom and Napoleon how very glad he was to be out of that hole.

CHAPTER VII

NIGHT IN THE CITY

TOM never found the owner of that dog though he tried honestly to do so. He was, however, very glad that no claimant appeared, and Nap, the dog, seemed to feel much the same way about it. Tom had named him after Napoleon as both were so black, and also because it pleased Napoleon, who had remarked when the name was bestowed, "I done hep save dat dawg, why fo' shouldn't he bear mah name? Napoleon is a good name for man or beast," and so the black bulldog was christened.

Be all this as it may, the rescued answered to Nap as though he had honestly borne the title all his three years. Tom was permitted to build a packing-case kennel for him in the rear yard of the house he lived in. The landlady surrendered to the argument that he was sure proof against thieves. "I've been expecting to be robbed all my life," said she, "and though it hasn't happened yet, you never can tell.

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Goodness knows I have little enough now, what would it be if I were robbed. As the saying is 'they take it from them that hasn't anything to give to the rich,' or something like that, I can't remember. Yes, you can keep the dog in the rear yard, and he may be the saving of us all, providing, of course, he don't go mad and send us all to the Pasteur Institute which is expensive and goodness knows would be almost as bad as being robbed. Perhaps after all it would be better to turn him over to the police. When you come to think of his going mad, there'd be no saving against robbers."

"Bulldogs don't go mad, Mrs. Simkins, it's the other kind," protested Tom.

"Very well, then, you look after him careful like and I hope he don't howl all night."

Nap never had to be taught to come when Tom called, for if he was loose, he was there already, nor did he have to be taught to lie down, sit, or stand, for he did all these things when his heart's idol, Tom, did them. It was as though he bore constantly in mind the thought, "This man saved my life, I'm his forever. I'll worship him till I die. I'll work for him and fight for him and oh, how I

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wish I could save his life just to show him what I think of him!"

Mrs. Stewart's comment on the advent into their family of the dog Nap was, "Poor people always seem to burden themselves with useless domestic animals. All we need now is a cat and a goat."

"I'd like a Maltese cat or a coon cat," said Mary.

"And I'd like a goat," spoke up the irrepressible Guy.

"We could keep the cat in our flat, the dog in the yard and the goat on the roof," suggested Tom.

"And so be constantly surrounded by friends," laughed Mary. "Wish we lived on a farm where we could keep animals, I'd like to have chickens as well as a cat."

"I don't want to live on a farm. I want to be a successful hardware merchant. I want to work up to superintendent and own stock in our company. And I'm going to do it, too," said Tom.

"I believe you will," replied his mother seriously. "I believe you can get anything if you really want it hard enough. It means sacrifice, but all things worth while mean sacrifice. You only get out of a thing what you put into it."

This talk took place about the supper-table where

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such talks were apt to develop. There was a comfortable sort of feeling on such occasions, a feeling that half-developed ideas and aspirations might safely be brought forth and fairly discussed to the benefit of the speaker. Even Guy brought his troubles and crude ideas before this board for its kindly consideration, its help and suggestions. But this was Saturday night and a great adventure lay ahead.

"This city is a wonderful place when you can scrape off what's on top and see what it really is underneath," said Tom.

"All you'll find will be dirt and stones and sewer pipes and gas pipes, subways and electric wires," put in Guy.

"Hold on, look what happened when Nap fell into that well. Where did that well come from? Mr. Fort said it was on the old Stuyvesant farm and that what is now Third Avenue was the Bowery or country road to Peter Stuyvesant's ranch. Think of that, our dog falling into Peter Stuyvesant's well!"

"He wasn't our dog then," was Guy's irritating comment.

"But think of our hardware store being on a farm and the old moss-covered well still there and as good as ever."

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"Good for nothing but for a dog to fall into," persisted Guy.

"And now," said Mrs. Stewart, "we'll take a walk out over part of this great New York farm and see what it looks like at night. It's the most wonderful farm in the world."

It was a summer night and the white-clad workers from the street cleaning department were flushing the asphalt pavement so that it glistened black and reflected the lights from the street lamps. There was a coolness in the air brought in on a liberal breeze from the great and wonderful harbor which sifted impartially among the narrow streets of the great city. The portion of the breeze that belonged to this side street had been cooled again by passing over the wet asphalt, so that its refreshing breath touched and inspired one little group of pleasure seekers as they walked toward the greater brilliance of Sixth Avenue.

"I like the sound of that water running in the gutter," said Mary, "it's like a brook."

"What do you know about a brook? You've always lived in the city," said Tom.

"Of course I know what a brook is like. I've been to Bronx Park, and I can remember once, be-

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fore father died, that he took us all to the country where there was a wonderful brook right through fields and fields of grass and where he caught trout and brought them home," said Mary wistfully.

"Your father was a great fisherman and loved to be out of doors," said Mrs. Stewart.

"I'd like to fish, too," said Guy.

"I'd like the fishing, all right," said Tom, "but I don't want to go to the country. I want to make good in the hardware business, it's the greatest business there is. You can't do anything without the things we sell."

"So long as you feel that way about what you are doing, you're sure to succeed," said Mrs. Stewart. "Here's Sixth Avenue, let's walk north to Thirty-fourth Street and Broadway."

When they arrived at the intersection of Broadway and Sixth Avenue the full glamour of the Great White Way shone forth scintillating, glittering, a strange product of the twentieth century. Aside from the millions of stationary lights, there were the great electric lights on the sides and tops of buildings as far as one could see, some in motion, others still, and advertising everything from chewing-gum to automobile tires.

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"The chewing-gum signs chew, the wheels on the auto signs go round, the ginger-ale sign pours ale into a glass and the glass fills up, the wind blows the electric flag and you see it wave—all by electricity. It certainly is great! We sell electric fixtures," said Tom.

"Your mind is on your business, certainly," laughed Mary.

"I'm going to be an electrician," said Guy.

"I thought it was a policeman," reminded Tom.

"Ah—h!" said Guy.

"It's brilliant, it's truly wonderful, but I don't like it," said Mrs. Stewart and here they turned into their chosen theater.

CHAPTER VIII

TOM MAKES A MISTAKE

THE movies were great," said Tom as the little procession stepped once more into the glare of the electric signs and other lights that made the Great White Way famous.

"I can remember everything. Wish they gave us history that way in school," said Guy, "then I'd never have to study, I'd just be interested."

"They talk of doing that very thing. They are doing it already in some schools," replied Mrs. Stewart.

"How smart grown-up people are getting to be," said Guy with relish.

"How smart some very young people always are," said Mary.

"Ah—h!" said Guy.

The side street was dark enough compared with the riot of light on the big avenues. Also it seemed the people, few and far between, who lurked here

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and there, were not of the same gay sort that crowded the Great White Way. Several beggars accosted them on their homeward journey and most of them uttered their appeals in a sing-song tone that indicated long use of the same threadbare phrases. Usually the song ran, "Say, mister, won't you help a fellow in hard luck. I'm a carpenter, I just got in today on a freight from Pittsburg. I'm looking for work, ain't had nothing to eat for two days." Tom had walked the streets of New York in search of work so long that he knew this sort of grafter well and when one of them was very insistent and even threatening, he stopped him short with, "I know your graft, better move on or I'll call a cop." The effect was instantaneous and satisfactory. There were other beggars whose appeals were genuine and where the call for aid went to the hearts of the little group.

"One reason I'd like to be a successful man would be so I could help some of these," said Tom thoughtfully.

"That's a good reason for wanting money, and I hope you get it some day," said Mrs. Stewart. "Here we are home and I'm mighty thankful you found work so we can keep our little household together."

TOM MAKES A MISTAKE

"Wait till I get a job and we'll be rich," said Guy.

"Get your lessons first so you'll be worth something," suggested Mary.

"The more you know, the more you're worth," said Tom, quoting from the boss. "I'm glad to-morrow's Sunday. I'm tired."

"Breakfast at eight-thirty and all ready for church at ten-thirty," called Mrs. Stewart as the young people turned in.

Monday morning appeared on schedule time and Tom was given a bundle of silver-plated tableware to deliver up in the Bronx. He had with him a receipt which listed the various articles which the customer, a Mrs. Saltair, was to sign. In this instance he had also checked back the receipt himself with the original order so he knew that the order was properly filled.

It was rather a pretentious flat that Tom called at that morning and the bell-boy allowed him on the elevator with reluctance because of his bundle. When he finally reached the apartment door a maid in curl papers slammed the door in his face and communicated his errand to the mistress. This important personage appeared in about fifteen minutes and scolded Tom for getting people up so early. She

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was tall and stout, red of face and gray of hair, and, like the maid, was crowned with curl papers. She was not in an amiable mood and Tom had learned enough to say as little as possible under such circumstances.

"I'll look them over," she said sharply as Tom delivered his package.

Tom waited a long time and when Mrs. Saltair reappeared she had worked herself into a very effective show of wrath.

"They are not at all as ordered," she snapped, "you may take them all back."

"Why!" exclaimed Tom, "I looked over your order this morning and everything is exactly as ordered, the way Fort & Saxe always do."

"Oh, you did, did you?" Then turning to her maid, "Did you hear that, Clara, 'The way Fort & Saxe always do,' that's quite smart from an errand-boy." Then turning and glaring at Tom, she ordered, "Take those things back. I'll see Mr. Fort and he shall know how impudent you've been."

Tom felt he'd made a mess of things, somehow, yet he knew he was right so far as the facts were concerned.

As he rode home in the subway he turned the mat-

TOM MAKES A MISTAKE

ter over in his mind. "She said the goods were not as ordered but I know they were. I stood up for our house and I know I was right."

When at length he reached the store with his bundle it was necessary to explain the difficulty he had met with in trying to make the delivery. This he did in the presence of Mr. Fort who happened to be nearby. He repeated the short conversation accurately and his own part in justifying the house of Fort & Saxe he emphasized with some pride.

"There's where you were all wrong as a salesman," said Mr. Fort. "Put this down where you will never forget it. The customer is always dead right. Have no arguments with the customer, he pays our rent, our salaries, clothes our children, buys our houses. We are here to serve the customer, when we can no longer do that, Fort & Saxe are out of business. If the matter is serious, bring it to Mr. Finch or to me, better still, never let it get serious enough to have to bring it to either of us."

Tom was utterly taken aback. Here was advice that seemed unreasonable. "The customer always right," he repeated slowly, "I thought Fort & Saxe were always right, we try hard enough."

MAKING GOOD IN THE VILLAGE

"Yes, but what are we trying to do?" inquired Mr. Fort sharply.

"Why, sell hardware," answered Tom automatically.

"Well then, take this instance, and see where you lost a chance to sell hardware. Mrs. Saltair says the goods are not as ordered. What should be your next step? You should say, 'Very well, Mrs. Saltair, I'm sorry they are not as you want them, but here's our catalogue, make your own selections. We're glad to take back this shipment, or any other that you do not like.' Then like enough you'd have had an order to take the place of the one lost, now you have not only lost an order, but as it stands, a customer as well."

Tom felt it dreadfully. "Let me go back and get her to take other goods," he pleaded.

"I'm afraid I'll have to go myself before this can be fixed up," said Mr. Fort. "You are not to blame overmuch, you're not a salesman, but if you ever expect to be one you must learn to put yourself and your feelings in the background; the sale is your object and the sale depends on the customer. When you're selling, watch your customer as a cat watches a mouse. See your goods through his eyes, feel them

TOM MAKES A MISTAKE

with his fingers and lead him gently till the sale is made. Remember also the sale is never quite complete so long as the customer lives and you want to continue doing business with him, so the sale must be complete from every point of view." Mr. Fort smiled. "You'll learn by your mistakes, but don't make the same mistakes right along."

"Let me try her again this afternoon," pleaded Tom, insisting on a dangerous chance.

"I'm afraid you've killed yourself there, but you may try it, if you think you can make good. Here, Mr. Phelps, fix Tom up with a good line of samples of tableware, he knows the prices, and let him have another try at Mrs. Saltair. I know her well enough to fix this up if he fails."

Mr. Phelps shook his head. "She's a holy terror," he muttered, "and I'm glad Tom told her the truth, she got what she ordered and that's all there is to it."

CHAPTER IX

TOM GOES BACK

I LIKE a fighter," continued Mr. Fort. "If you've been a coward and run away, go back and fight it out. Then you're no coward. If you've told a lie, go back and tell the truth, then you're no liar. If you've made a mistake, go back and correct it, then you're no fool. Go back, son, if you ran away and take your licking. If you lied, admit it, and that's hard, or admit your mistake and get laughed at, and that's harder, but you'll know you're a man and so will every other man. Don't drag a chain of little defeats, lies and mistakes around for life, go back and cut them off before it is too late. All men run away at times, all men lie at times and all men make mistakes. Those who go back and fight, or admit the lie, or correct the mistake, as far as possible, get to the place some day where they don't run from anything, where they tell the truth and where they make fewer mistakes and so they be-

TOM GOES BACK

come real men. Now you go back and fix it up with Mrs. Saltair," he added with an appreciative smile.

Mr. Phelps laid out a complete sample line of plated tableware for Tom that afternoon and as the latter inspected it, he exclaimed, "Why, you've put in a set of samples of the very grade she just returned."

"Oh, that's all right, she's just as apt to order that again as anything! She's only ordered it once and only returned it once, that's nothing for some women. When you can put your hand over your heart and say you understand them, you may be a wonder, but the chances are you're plumb crazy!"

Tom laughed. "Wish I understood Mrs. Saltair well enough to straighten out the mess I made as a salesman this morning."

"Don't worry. When you see her this afternoon you may find her a regular 'Sunny Jim'; women are changeable," and Mr. Phelps, who was a bachelor, looked very wise.

"Wonder if she wears curl papers all day?" queried Tom.

"Did she have 'em on when you called this morning?"

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"She certainly did, the whole family was wearing them."

"That accounts for your trouble. Never talk business to a woman wearing curl papers. She knows she's not looking her best and she just wants you to clear out. You can't do business with her when she feels that way."

"Wish I'd known that before."

"Oh, well, she may be all fussed up this afternoon, and you'll have an easy time."

It was about three o'clock when Tom again appeared before Mrs. Saltair and the vision that met his eyes was quite other than he had looked for. Mrs. Saltair was no longer a grumpy, gray, elderly, fat lady but though a trifle plump, her complexion was of a youthful shade of pink, her eyes were brilliant and she had the most becoming curly brown hair. Tom was not quite sure of her but he managed to say, "I have some samples here from Fort & Saxe for your approval. Mr. Fort wanted me to show you these and if there isn't anything here that you like, I'll bring other samples till I've shown you everything in our store," Tom finished, breathing heavily.

"Oh, how lovely, how perfectly lovely! Clara,

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do come here and help me make a selection; Fort & Saxe goods you know, the very best."

The maid Clara responded promptly and Tom was surprised to note that her attitude toward Fort & Saxe was precisely that of her mistress. He also noted that there were no papers in her hair.

"Phelps is right," he said to himself, "it makes a difference. I'll never try to sell anything to a woman when her hair is put up in curl papers."

"Now, Clara," continued Mrs. Saltair, shaking her long black earrings contemplatively, "do help me to make a wise selection."

Tom had placed the samples on the dining-room table where they made an excellent display. "How much does this set cost?" asked Mrs. Saltair, indicating the one she had returned so indignantly that very morning. Tom quoted the price. "Rather too expensive but I do like them," commented Mrs. Saltair. "What do you think of them, Clara?" she added, turning to her maid.

"Perfectly lovely," echoed Clara having caught the drift of her mistress's mind.

"I think I prefer these," said Mrs. Saltair, indicating the highest priced set of those shown.

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"They are nice," murmured Clara, ready to swing with the tide.

"Yes, but expensive," continued Mrs. Saltair.

"They are expensive," admitted Clara.

"But I do like them better than the others," said Mrs. Saltair.

"They are nicer," said Clara.

"I think I'll take the first set," said Mrs. Saltair.

"They're better value for the money," said Clara.

"Thank you, Clara, for helping me make up my mind."

"Now, young man," said Mrs. Saltair, turning to Tom, "see that this set is delivered promptly, and thank you for bringing so many for me to select from. Thank Mr. Fort for me."

"With pleasure," said Tom, as he gathered up his samples. He filled out his order sheet in duplicate and left one copy with Mrs. Saltair. The maid, Clara, showed him to the door and Tom had made his first sale.

As he rode home, Tom turned the matter over and over in his mind. "She didn't say a thing about sending me flying this morning. She selected the same set I brought then. She was agreeable. She was just a different person. What was wrong this

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morning, I wonder? Guess it must have been the curl papers. I wonder if I'll ever make a salesman."

When Tom got back to the store, he felt privileged to call at the office to report his remarkable success with Mrs. Saltair.

"Feel better now?" inquired Mr. Fort, looking up from the letter he was reading.

"Yes, sir," answered Tom. "It feels better to come back with a sale than the loss of one."

"I know how it feels," replied the boss, "selling is a great game."

"But she was so different from this morning. Then everything was wrong, now everything seems right. She re-ordered the very set she turned down this morning."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Fort. "There's no accounting for the way a woman'll change her mind; some men just as queer," he added grimly.

"I'd like to be a salesman," suggested Tom.

"Like the game, hey? Well, we'll see. Remember what I said about going back and correcting a mistake before it's too late?"

"Yes, sir, and I'm glad I went."

"Feels better to leave the matter the way it is now than the way you left it this morning, doesn't it?"

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"I should say so, and I thank you for letting me go back."

"Now, Tom, I'm going to put you at tending the door a while. That seems like a very simple matter but it's a very important one. You can yank the door open in such a way as to make a customer feel like an intruder or you can swing it open so as to make him feel welcome at once."

"Thank you, sir, I'll do my best." Though Tom answered bravely, he was distinctly disappointed. "Doorkeeper!" he murmured to himself, "why it's a poorer job than errand-boy. I thought my next job would be assistant to one of the salesmen."

CHAPTER X

DOORKEEPER

TOM watched that front door for six long months. Here he learned the names of many of the customers and they also got to know him. It was his place to inquire the wants of those who entered there and direct them to the proper salesmen. He became in time a regular bureau of information, answering questions as to stock on hand, prices and discounts, and he also learned to be polite under all conditions and with all customers.

He had only been at his new post a little more than a week when Mr. Fort strolled down to the front door early one morning and facing Tom looked him over slowly from head to heel. "Where are the Universal Window Fasteners?" he asked.

"Section forty-eight, four lower drawers, right-hand side," answered Tom, thinking for the moment that the boss had asked for information.

"Price per gross in bronze?"

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"Twenty-four dollars."

"Nickel?"

"Twenty-eight dollars."

"Jobbers' discount?"

"Sixty, ten and five."

"Trade discount?"

"Fifty, ten and five."

"Right, your wages are now seven per week. Keep right on the way you are going."

"Thank you, sir," said Tom, and as the boss walked off up the aisle, he added, "I didn't know I was being examined. One thing sure, I start a bank account with the first two dollars of my new raise. Won't mother be glad to know how I'm getting along, it'll cheer her up, she hasn't seemed any too well lately."

Saturday night Tom started a bank account at the National Savings Institute, a bank making a point of staying open evenings for just such fellows as himself. It was a proud moment when he signed the big book and after depositing his two dollars was handed his first pass-book. He told his mother and Mary and Guy all about it when he returned, but there was another matter which, though not really very important, was engaging a lot of the time

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and attention of all the people in any way connected with Fort & Saxe and that was the great annual outing given by the firm for their employees. It was a big family affair and as it was always well-managed, it was sure to be thoroughly enjoyed by all who took part in it. To various committees were assigned the duties of providing music, a grand dinner and entertainment, and as novelties under this latter head were always in order, home talent of various sorts was apt to be in evidence and was sure to be as thoroughly appreciated as professional service.

Tom had an idea of his own for providing one feature of the entertainment on which he worked industriously, and when the great outing day came, he was prepared with the help of several of the salesmen and Mike and Fritz to put his scheme through.

It was an August morning dry and clear with promise of great heat later in the day. Tom and his mother, Mary and Guy were all down at the North River Pier with the other members of the families and friends of the employees of Fort & Saxe. The steamer on which they were to sail away was fast to the dock with steam up and all ready the moment the last belated passenger should have come aboard, and of course, that passenger had to be the

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one least expected. The great hawser had been thrown off the spile and drawn aboard the side-wheeler which was slowly swinging out toward the Jersey shore, when a volley of short, anxious barks called attention to the rapid approach of a black bulldog whose short and crooked legs were being worked under severe pressure. The gap between the dock and the boat was rapidly widening but Nap took a chance and projected his stumpy body into mid air. No one expected to see him land on the boat, but he did succeed in hooking his short front legs over the scuppers, and the tall colored gentleman who pulled him in the rest of the way remarked, "Clare to gracious, if dis ain't de second time I'se saved yo' from drownin', nex' time I'se gwin' let yo' hab yo' own way."

"Why, it's Nap!" exclaimed Mary, when the wearer of that name had sought her out in the crowd and insisted on showing his enthusiasm at the meeting. "Nap, you rascal!" exclaimed Tom, but though they tried to scold him, he was such a good-natured chap that they soon gave it up and when Napoleon told how nearly he had lost himself in coming aboard, Nap immediately became the hero of the occasion and was petted instead of being censured.

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"Dat dawg got a mind o' his own," commented Napoleon, "when he mek up his mind he gwine somewhere, dat's whar he gwine."

"I'm almost ready to start something," said Tom to his assistants, "but I'll wait till the music stops."

When there came a pause in the flow of sound, Tom, supported by Mr. Phelps and several other salesmen mounted a chair and faced his good-natured audience. "The time has come," he commenced. "Hear, hear!" called Mr. Phelps. "The time has come," repeated Tom, "to set before the American investing public the Great North Western Cat Ranch Proposition. The falling off in the supply of all fur-bearing animals, due to the fact that so many of them are shot and the rest die of old age and other diseases, has made this the opportunity of a lifetime."

"Hear, hear!" shouted Mr. Phelps, and he added, "Get your check books ready! All checks, promises to pay, I. O. U.'s accepted at full face value. We trust everybody!"

"The purpose of this great Ranch Company," continued Tom, "is to operate and develop the greatest cat ranch on earth. The location is not yet positively decided, but it is thought the Great North

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West will do because there is so much room out there and everything started there always succeeds." Here he hesitated a moment for words.

"There's a lot of cleared land in Massachusetts," came a voice, and Tom started a little to find Mr. Fort was one of the audience. His slight embarrassment passed quickly and he went on, "The location is not important so long as we have plenty of room. Now to get down to brass tacks, we will collect about one million cats, all kinds. Each cat will have about a dozen kittens per year. Skins are worth ten cents each for white to seventy cents each for clear black, and, to be on the safe side, we will say about thirty cents average per skin. Thus you see we will have twelve million skins each year which at thirty cents will give us a daily gross income of about ten thousand dollars." The large figures brought out many exclamations from Tom's audience and some applause. There were shouts of "Go on," and thus encouraged Tom went on. "Friends, these are dry statistics, but I trust you will find them interesting. At two dollars a day a man can skin fifty cats. It will take about one hundred men to run the ranch and so our net profit will be nine thousand eight hundred dollars per day.

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"Now to feed the cats we will start a rat ranch right along side the cat ranch. It is a well-known scientific fact that rats multiply just four times as fast as cats, hence, if we start with one million rats, we will have four rats a day for each cat which is sufficient. The carcasses of the cats will feed the rats, one-fourth of a cat to each rat. Thus you see the business is self-sustaining, continuous, automatic. The cats will eat the rats and the rats will eat the cats and we will get the skins.

"The Great North Western Cat Ranch Company is a stock company. Shares are now offered for the first time, and it is a wonderful opportunity to get rich suddenly and without work. My assistants will now pass round the certificates. Anything that looks like money will be accepted or, if you left your pocketbook at home, a promise will do as well. This is a liberal offer and no man, woman, or child should go home without a share in the stock of the Great North Western Cat Ranch Company." Tom sat down amid great applause as his assistants, Mr. Phelps and the other salesmen, circulated among the excursionists distributing flaring stock certificates on the reverse side of which appeared the program for the amusements of the day.

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As Tom passed Mr. Fort a little later the boss asked, "Your idea, that cat ranch?"

"I borrowed it," replied Tom with a smile.

"It was your application then of another man's idea?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then put your wits to work and get me some good novelty in the way of an idea for our window display."

"I'll try," said Tom.

"Now I've got myself into trouble," he said later as he stood with his little family group looking over the rail of the steamship as they sped down the great New York harbor, and he told them of his conversation with Mr. Fort.

"It's the beginning of more important work for you," said Mrs. Stewart. "Mr. Fort thinks you have original ideas and he's going to give you a chance to work them out."

"The hardware business is certainly the greatest business in the world!" exclaimed Tom, "everything seems to fit into it."

"You've found your place," said Mrs. Stewart.

CHAPTER XI

WORKING OUT AN IDEA

THE excursion was a great success, but it seemed to have left but one impression on Tom and that was the need of discovering some big idea that would work up well in the show-window of Fort & Saxe. Mr. Fort talked little, but he had a way of stimulating his men to do their best and the thought he had planted in Tom's ambitious mind kept working constantly.

"Mother," said that somewhat over-anxious youth on the Sunday morning following the great picnic day, "I haven't a single original idea in me. Since Mr. Fort spoke of my suggesting something for that window, I can't seem to capture an idea of any sort."

"Don't be in such a hurry; Mr. Fort doesn't expect you to sit down and grind out wonderful thoughts for his business. He simply thought you showed signs of originality and he directed your mind toward window display. He's in no hurry, he

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never is, all he wants is for you to give him the benefit of any novel idea that might be used in the business."

"But I want to show him what I can do."

"Perhaps you just want to show him how smart you are. Just forget yourself for a while and your thoughts will come around to you in plenty of time. Now get ready for church. If it's a clear afternoon, we'll all make a visit to the Museum of Natural History. Promise me to keep your mind off the hardware business for the rest of the day."

"I'll try my best," replied Tom.

The morning passed quietly enough and three o'clock in the afternoon found the little group in the great Museum amid other seekers of profitable pleasure, people of the New World and of today trying to read and understand the people of the Old World and of yesterday. So many things of interest were before them, that finally Mrs. Stewart sat down on a bench exhausted. "There's altogether too much, and besides, I can't seem to get my breath as easily as I used to. I'll have to rest a while."

"I'll stay with you, mother, while Guy looks at the Indian exhibit; he's interested mostly in the weapons. He never tires of that," said Mary. "It's

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queer how everything that has to do with fighting interests a boy," she continued.

"I'd like to be a soldier, and fight Indians," said Guy.

"But they don't use tomahawks and bowie-knives nowadays," persisted Mary. "Why are you interested in the old war things?"

"It isn't so much what they used to kill themselves with as the kind o' men they were," explained Guy.

"Go along with you and get all the good out of it you can," and Mary banished the younger brother with a sweep of the arm. "And now, Tom, what have you been looking at?" asked the sister as the older brother came out from a double row of glass-cases.

"I've been looking at the greatest collection of hatchets I ever saw, never knew there could have been so many different kinds."

"Right in your own line, too," said Mary with a smile. "Hardware forever!"

"Now don't let him get his mind on business again," said Mrs. Stewart, "a wholesome man ought to be interested in many things besides his business."

"But you've just given me the idea I needed!" exclaimed Tom excitedly.

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"Who has?" asked Mary.

"You have," said Tom, "you just said those stone hatchets are right in my line. Now I have my idea and I can rest. Mother, I'll not give hardware another thought today, but I had to get my idea first."

Mrs. Stewart sighed as the young folk started off on another excursion among the relics of bygone ages. "So like his father: he, too, would work out an idea to the bitter end. Well, it's a good trait," and Mrs. Stewart settled back on the Museum bench and shut her eyes.

The rest of that day and on into the night Tom tried hard not to think hardware, but he did think of hatchets. He thought of the primitive man clothed in the skins of wild beasts and armed with his crude stone ax; he thought of the knight in armor with his flashing battle-ax, of the Indian with his tomahawk, of the double-edged ax used by those wonderfully skilled axmen of our own north woods; he thought of the remarkable collection of axes, hatchets and hammers shown in the great Museum, and then he thought, "Fort & Saxe handle the finest axes, hatchets and hammers made. I'll work out a show-window that people will talk about."

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Tom was weeks in getting his material together. He found he could not borrow stone hatchets from the Museum of Natural History, but it was through the kindness of one of the officers of this institution that he learned of a small private collection that he did borrow for Fort & Saxe, so that when he was ready, he had a specimen of nearly everything in axes and hatchets from the stone age down to the great American ax of today. The display showing the evolution of the ax required both large show-windows and attracted so much attention that Mr. Fort kept it in the windows for more than a month.

"Your own idea?" asked Mr. Fort.

"I don't 'quite know," replied Tom. "When I tried to think of something original, I hadn't a thought. I went to the Museum one Sunday and somebody said the ax exhibition was in my line. No, it wasn't my own idea, I borrowed it."

"Good! We all work by suggestion. Keep your mind awake and borrow ideas from anywhere that fit the hardware business. Don't be afraid of an idea because it's new. Now you work with the window display men whenever we make a change in display. Your ax idea was good. Try for another suggestion."

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"I haven't another thought left, that was my only one," said Tom rather mournfully.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Fort. "Used up all you had in your one window display. Now listen to me. I started just as you did. I want you to look ahead and make up your mind what you want and go about making it yours. You'll hear a lot said about luck, and there is such a thing, but you'll notice, if you keep your eyes open, that luck comes to the fellow who is prepared for it. Something worth thinking about there, isn't there? It's a little strange that luck should come to the man prepared for it, isn't it? Just turn that thought over in your mind that preparedness makes you ready for luck when it comes. Some call it opportunity."

Tom thought it over very carefully. There was a certain amount of luck that came to him, usually in the form of more or higher grade work, and now the window-dressing meant night work and that meant a little extra money, and as this money was an extra it went into the small but steadily growing bank account. Tom was growing and getting ready all the time for another step forward.

CHAPTER XII

WHAT DID YOU SEE?

ONE morning not long after the ax exhibition, business had taken Tom downtown to one of the great hardware stores on Park Row. While there he had nosed around taking mental notes of the differences in the stock carried and in the way of handling it as compared with the Fort & Saxe methods. He returned with his mind full of questions as to why Fort & Saxe did not carry some of the lines displayed by the store he had just been through. As he entered the door he overheard Mr. Fort saying to Mr. Phelps, "You've got to keep some of the old standard lines even though you know of modern makes superior to the old ones. New York City is not one great modern town but a collection of villages, some domestic and some foreign, some up to the minute and some very old-fashioned. Why, there are homes in this city where they still keep a volume of universal information alongside the

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family album on the center-table, have an organ in the parlor and put out the cat promptly at nine P. M."

"Guess we'll have to keep the old lines, then," said Mr. Phelps with a smile.

"Certainly, the demand will be steady if not large," said Mr. Fort, and as Tom entered, he turned to him with, "You've been to Porter & Porter's this morning?"

"Yes, sir," replied Tom.

"What did you see?"

"Why, er, I saw about all they had," stammered Tom.

"No, no, tell me what you saw. Hardware is your business. You've just been in a competitor's place. Now, what did you see?"

"I saw they keep a full line of sheet brass, all gauges, and we don't."

"That's seeing something. Go on, what else did you see?"

"I saw a full line of brass tubing, of copper tubing and sheet copper, of copper and brass wire. It took a whole floor for just these items, so there must be a good demand. Why don't we keep them? Nobody else has them uptown," answered Tom stoutly.

WHAT DID YOU SEE?

“Good! That’s seeing something. Now, how do you know nobody else carries these lines uptown?”

“I’ve been errand-boy and been sent out to all the hardware stores one time and another to get special parts and things we don’t carry, and there isn’t another store uptown that carries a line like I’ve just told about seeing at Porter & Porter’s.”

“That’s seeing, that’s seeing, and you’ve given me something to think about. It’s a good question to ask yourself once in a while, ‘What did you see?’”

When Tom had been with Fort & Saxe a little over two years his salary had been raised to twelve dollars a week and he had been in every department as assistant salesman. He had also served a short time as stock clerk and had helped out on the books one summer when the bookkeeper had been home sick.

It was on a brisk March morning that he was called into the private office of Mr. Fort, and this time he entered that place of questions with some assurance for he knew his record was good.

“Tom, you’ve been with us now for more than two years. You’ve been about everything from errand-boy to assistant salesman, and while you’re rather

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young, I'm going to give you a chance as salesman at fifteen dollars a week."

"Thank you, Mr. Fort. I'll make good, I know. I can't help but make good. I love the work, I believe in the house and the goods."

"That's the talk, that's what makes a salesman."

"I'm saving up my money and some day I want to buy stock in this company."

"Save your money, but as to stock in this company—well, we shall see."

"I want to be part of this concern."

"Every one who works here with us is part of this concern just as much as I am."

"Still, I want to be a stockholder. I want to own part of it, if it's only a very small part," persisted Tom.

"Well, then, stick to your purpose, but there's no hurry, you may find something better to do with your money when the time comes. Hold to your dream, though, and hold hard. First the dream, then efficient work toward that dream and the dream will come true, but you've got to have the dream first."

"I've had the dream ever since I ran my first errand here," said Tom.

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"Been coming true ever since, hey?" asked Mr. Fort with a smile.

"Yes, but the dream keeps growing."

"That's the only kind of a dream to have. If you've no dream, it's a sure sign you're in a rut, and as the rut gets deeper it makes your grave."

"No rut for me," said Tom as he rose to leave. "Thank you again, Mr. Fort. I'll earn it."

"I know that or you wouldn't get it, and I hope that's only a beginning," said Mr. Fort. Then as Tom turned to go, he added, "Think ahead; all things are thought out first; thoughts are things."

Tom went home that night with much to think of.

He was now nineteen years of age and was a real man though a young one. Mary was blossoming out into a young lady and Guy had graduated from grammar school and was now in high school. The only cloud on the horizon which occasioned any great anxiety was the health of Mrs. Stewart and this was serious. Tom, Mary and Guy had taken the matter in hand and were doing all that young people could do to make life easy for their mother, but the dry cough continued and the doctor insisted Mrs. Stewart should leave the city. To this end a vacation was planned for Mrs. Stewart in the cool Catskill

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mountains, and though she protested at the expense, she was made to go and there she stayed through the long summer. Tom and Mary kept house and Guy did his part by getting a summer job as errand-boy in a bank and here the great New York game served him well. Tom managed to keep his savings intact, but they did not grow any to speak of this year. Mrs. Stewart improved slowly, but when she came back in the fall, Dr. Davis, who examined her thoroughly, gave it as his opinion that she could not live in the city.

Here was a problem such as Tom had never reckoned on. It seemed to him like the end of the world. All his plans for his future were laid in his business. Fort & Saxe was the cornerstone of his life. To move to the country on account of his mother's health meant the ruin of his prospects, now so well-founded, of becoming a successful hardware merchant. To Tom it looked like failure.

CHAPTER XIII

A NEW COUNTRY

TOM had a restless night of it. Over and over again he fumbled with his problem, "Must mother go to the country? Could she not be taken care of in the city just as well? Would another doctor give different advice? If she really had to go, could he not remain and still work with Fort & Saxe and support the family better by so doing?" When at length morning came, he had reached the conclusion that he would interview Dr. Davis once more and then lay the matter before Mr. Fort and be guided by the advice of these two able friends.

It was almost noon when by appointment he called on Dr. Davis and when he was seated in the inner office he unburdened himself at once. "Doctor, is it absolutely necessary for us to move to the country? I want to do what's right, but it ruins all my plans to leave the city. I don't see how I can help

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support the family, as I am now doing, if I lose my present position."

"I'm sorry, Tom, but your mother is threatened with serious lung trouble. Plenty of cool, fresh air with milk and eggs and I think her chances are good for many years to come. With ample means she might even recover in the city, uptown, opposite the park with everything money could buy, but for people in your circumstances the country is the only reasonable solution. Your mother has some income from insurance money and with what you can earn you could get along nicely, and in the end you might do just as well in a business way in a small town as in the city."

"Oh," groaned Tom, "all I've worked for these years goes for nothing!"

"You're wrong there, for though I'm no business man, I know that every last thing you have learned about business will be of use to you later. Besides, that's not the question," added the doctor sharply, "the question is, is it worth while to prolong your mother's life?"

"There's no question about that at all, and I'd already made up my mind to go, but it is costing me so much that I want to make sure it is absolutely

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necessary, that's all. I'd go if it meant prolonging her life by one day."

"That's the talk I like to hear," said Dr. Davis kindly. "I'm afraid it is absolutely necessary to make this change. Quietness, fresh air and proper food will work wonders in this case and the farther back from the sea the better. I know a town over the hills west of here, pretty close to the Pennsylvania line, that would be just about right. I'm making some inquiries for you now. I want the right town and the right sort of house for you. There's no use making the change till we have just what is best for my patient."

"Doctor, I want to thank you for all this. I'll do what you say. I know you are doing the best possible for my mother."

"Well, Tom, there are not many women like her and we must see to it she has the best we can give her. I know it's hard for you, for Mrs. Stewart has told me of your progress with Fort & Saxe, but I believe you'll make a place for yourself even in a country town. Many of our biggest and best business men have come from the country. You can work it out there as well as in the city."

"I'll try at any rate," and Tom left with his an-

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swer from the doctor and returned to the hardware store where he laid his problem before Mr. Fort.

"Tom, I'm sorry. I want you in our business, but there's only one answer to your problem, go with your mother! I'll give you a recommendation that will help you get a place in some other hardware store, and if you get to the place where you start for yourself I'll give you a line of credit here that will be as good as capital to you. Should you ever return to the city, there's a place for you with Fort & Saxe. Keep in touch with me. If you strike a likely town, we might be tempted to start a branch. I believe in you, Tom Stewart. Stick to your own line and you'll work out your problem as well in a small town as here."

"Thank you, Mr. Fort, you've helped me from the first."

"Nonsense, you've helped yourself. You forced yourself on us by main strength, and when you proposed beating the time clock by getting here early you made a real start and you've been growing ever since. Now you're not going to stop growing suddenly just because you have to move to another town. The same kind of work that means success here will mean success in any place on earth."

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"I'm going to stick to the hardware business wherever I go. I like it, it's my business."

"And you'll be a success, son, but you'll need your courage and all you've learned here. Making a change of the sort you propose is hard, but you'll be all the more a man when you win out."

Tom felt greatly encouraged by these talks with these two men in whom his belief was strongly founded, and he talked quite cheerfully of the coming change.

"Tom, I'm greatly concerned that you are to make this change on my account," said Mrs. Stewart that evening as they talked over the whole matter at the dinner-table.

"I'm not," said Guy. "The country's the place for me. I want to be a farmer and raise things to eat."

"I thought it was a policeman."

"Ah—h!" said Guy.

"I'm glad we're going to the country," said Mary. "I think it will be much nicer than the crowded city and mother will get well and strong and we'll all be so happy."

"We've always been happy here," said Mrs. Stewart. "And so long as we keep together I'm sure we

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shall be happy anywhere, only let us never separate. I can stand anything but that."

Dr. Davis found the future home for the Stewart family and it was west of New York near the Pennsylvania line. It was in the hill country and the little house was singularly well situated, with improvements not usually found in country dwellings, and what was equally important, the rent was very low. All these items had been carefully considered by the doctor, but mountainous country, far removed from the coast moisture, had been the determining factor in the selection of Steubenville for the new home.

CHAPTER XIV

THE NEWCOMERS

STEUBENVILLE reposed in the broad valley which separated two long lines of blue hills, mountains, they were called by the natives, who had never seen the great western ranges. There was one main street which was therefore called Main Street, and from this central artery of commerce projected several other streets, the rear ends of which were built up with business houses, but which shortly passed this sort of structure to find themselves lined with the comfortable residences of the townspeople. Reaching out farther still these streets became the high roads, which pierced the farming country for miles in all directions. It was these roads which had made Steubenville the financial and business center of that end of the State, for though the population of the town was not more than five thousand, it supplied the wants and handled the produce of a wide and rich farming country.

MAKING GOOD IN THE VILLAGE

In common with other small American towns, Steubenville was well supplied with churches, there being six in all, all struggling desperately to make a showing, and with a full report of their various enterprises to be read in the columns of the *Steubenville Eagle* which took an uncertain flight every Friday. The American House had been the sole hostelry since Revolutionary days and was patronized, mainly, by traveling salesmen, largely because there was no other hotel in the place; but the post office was the real social and news center of the town.

Main Street ran the length of the valley and on one of the branch streets, crossing to the north and up through the hills, Dr. Davis had secured for the Stewart family a little white cottage surrounded by pine trees. There was a small barn in the rear, there were chicken houses and a tool-house and all were like the little white house itself in that they were in good repair and clean as a whistle. Dr. Davis had managed well for his patient, for there was a carefully laid-out vegetable garden, a smooth lawn and newly dug flower gardens, and though it was early spring, many hardy flowering plants and shrubs gave promise of blossoms to come.

Tom brought his family to Steubenville arriving

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late one Saturday afternoon. He did not know that the group about the railway station was there mainly to see the cars go by. He did not know that the coming of the Stewart family was a matter of great local interest, or that every trunk, bag or package that came with them was carefully noted, and that a description of every stitch they had on was accurately reported to the town at large by the lynx-eyed newsgatherers who witnessed them alight from the cars. There being no passengers for the American House the afternoon on which the Stewarts arrived, the hotel stage took the whole family, bag and baggage, to their new home. How little they realized that their journey through Steubenville was as public and as carefully reported as that of an inaugural trip of a new president down Pennsylvania Avenue! It was not the news item that would appear in the *Friday Eagle* which counted in Steubenville. That was meager publicity indeed compared with the carefully itemized information concerning the newcomers that passed from lip to lip, from store to store, from the post office to the ends of the roads that ran out and into the hills via a wireless system as old as man.

The modest furniture of the Stewarts had preceded them and was distributed rather indiscrim-

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inately about the house. The first and great necessity was to prepare temporary sleeping quarters for the new arrivals. Tom was in charge, well supported by Mary and Guy, while Mrs. Stewart was commanded by all three to be seated on the porch in a comfortable chair in the warm spring sunshine and wait until a room was well prepared for her occupation. In addition to the help rendered by Mary and Guy, Tom had secured the services of a middle-aged native woman by the name of Martha Acker, so with the help of this useful person the work of getting to rights progressed rapidly.

"It seems strange to come into a new place like this where you know no one and nobody knows you," remarked Mary as they were at work preparing the room Mrs. Stewart was to occupy.

"Now never you mind about them not knowin' you," responded Mrs. Acker with emphasis, "they's not a old woman nor yet a young child in Steubenville that don't know all about you, and they knowed it the moment you laid foot on the station platform."

"Why what nonsense, why should they care about us?"

"It was knowed that you had three trunks, a suitcase and a dog and two small bags, besides the small

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one Mrs. Stewart carried, and there was her coat Mr. Tom Stewart carried, which was considerable, him carryin' the two bags and runnin' back for the suit-case to the stage, which only strangers uses, everybody in Steubenville always walkin'. And it was knowed Mr. Tom Stewart had to give up his New York job and Mrs. Stewart was here for her health, and we all knowed what there was to the furniture, because that come first. They ain't no use tryin' to keep nothin' to yourself in Steubenville, they ain't nothin' nobody knows here but what everybody else knows it." Mrs. Acker stopped for breath and went on with her work.

"It seems so funny. Why should they care? In New York even the people that lived downstairs didn't know us or care anything about us, and I shouldn't be surprised if they didn't know we'd moved yet."

"It ain't that way here," continued Mrs. Acker. "I could tell you offhand just what's been goin' on here for twenty years and about all anybody's got. It ain't that I picks into other people's affairs, but you don't have to ask nothin' in this town 'fore it gets told to you. There's Alicia Norton gets the news first. I don't know how she does it, but she

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gets it, and then the other old maids has it from her confidential and then the whole town has it, and it don't take long gettin' spread about neither."

"Well, I guess we'll have to grin and bear it. Glad we haven't any family secrets."

"Wouldn't do you no good if you had 'em, they wouldn't stay secrets long in this town. They knows all about you—from what's hangin' out on the line to whether your grandfather was a horse thief or a undertaker."

"If everybody's looking at us as closely as that we'll have to behave ourselves," said Mary.

"Oh, you gets used to it after a while and it don't make no difference! I seen men in this town behave as bad as though there wan't nobody lookin' at 'em."

So it was well known in Steubenville that the Stewarts had arrived, and by the time Martha Acker had finished her work in assisting to make them comfortable for the night she had acquired other interesting information about the little household that sent her direct to the post office as soon as her labors were over for the day. She had no letters to wait for, but she found Alicia Norton mailing a return postal card.

"I ain't got no call to mail this card," said Alicia,

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“but it’s got the address printed on it and I filled in the blanks as requested, not that I wants their old catalogue, but I says it ain’t fair not returnin’ their post card when they pays for it and asks as a favor for you to return it. I hope they don’t send their old catalogue.”

“Oh, Alicia, jest listen, I got to tell somebody or bust! I jest been to the Stewarts, they got—”

“Land sakes! do tell! I won’t tell a soul—”

“Well, now, listen. I hadn’t ought to tell, but—hush, here comes Mr. Tom Stewart; some other time, I’ll tell—”

“Oh, I can’t wait, I’ll walk down the street with you—there never was so much goin’ on in Steubenville!” And the real news agency of the town walked off up Main Street arm in arm.

CHAPTER XV

ON TRIAL

TOM spent a week at the little white house helping to put it in order and found it very pleasant work. He also saw to it that Guy made a start at the local high school. Mrs. Stewart was made very comfortable in her bright room with its southerly exposure, and the rich creamy milk and fresh eggs supplied from a nearby farm were just exactly the fare Dr. Davis had advocated.

"I'll have my own chickens next week," said Mary. "I'm going to start with a dozen Leghorns; they tell me they're great layers."

"I wish I knew something about farming so I could run that vegetable garden," said Tom. "Guess I'll have to leave that to Guy, he'll have time to learn how. Hope I'll be able to land a job in town. I feel like a fish out of water without a job. I'm going the rounds this afternoon to see what chance there is for employment."

ON TRIAL

"Don't you worry; you'll land somewhere and be one of the leading men of the town," encouraged Mary.

"I haven't the least uncertainty about that," said Mrs. Stewart. "Tom has proved himself already and his business training with a first-class house will be of great value to some concern here."

"I've been about town a bit and I can't say I feel much encouraged," replied Tom. "There's only one hardware store, unless you can call that combination blacksmith shop and junk-heap across from the post office one, and it isn't likely that the one shop in the place is just ready to take me in because I happen to be in need of work."

"Well, don't discharge yourself before you've applied for the job," remarked Mary. "Anyway, I'll support the family on fresh eggs till you do get work."

"I think it'll take more than twelve old hens to keep this plant going. I'll try my luck after dinner."

"Mr. Henderson has promised to show Guy how to run a kitchen garden," said Mary.

"That'll be good. We'll live on your hens till the vegetables are ready and then we'll turn vegetarian and live on the garden."

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"Oh, you'll be in business by that time and with the hens and the garden we'll be living on the fat of the land." Mary could always see the bright side of any situation, but Tom felt the responsibility. Immediately after the noon meal he polished his shoes, brushed his clothes, put on a fresh collar and strode rapidly down the tree-lined walk to the village center.

It was a short walk east and west on Main Street till one came to the ends of the business section and Tom walked the full distance both ways before he turned into Slocum & Stilwell's hardware store. Tom liked the looks of the place, though it did not come up to the high standard of Fort & Saxe. "I like the smell of hardware," he thought to himself, "there's no other business for me."

There was no one in the store as Tom entered and while waiting for the appearance of one of the firm he noted several important differences between the class of stock shown here and in the New York stores. There were farm implements of all kinds, some of which Tom only knew from catalogue description, as they had not been carried by Fort & Saxe. A lot of space was devoted to seeds and the show-window was given over to fishing tackle, guns, ammunition

and other sporting goods. These and other differences in stock caught his eye at once and he presumed rightly that locality was the cause. "I'll have to learn another side of the business, hope I get the chance," he was thinking when an elderly man with pointed gray beard and sharp gray eyes entered the store from the rear and approached Tom. "Anybody waiting on you, Mr. Stewart?" he asked. Tom was beginning to realize fully that he was as well known throughout the town as though he had been advertised.

"No, but I would like to see one of the firm."

"I'm Mr. Slocum."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Slocum. I've been in the hardware business with Fort & Saxe and as I've come here to live, I'd like to get back in my own line. Any chance for me here?"

"Nothing right now. You see there's my boy, Sam, and Mr. Stilwell's two sons were here before Sam came in and Stilwell and I ain't dead yet. Wish we had a place for you seeing you've been with Fort & Saxe. Got a recommendation?"

"Yes," and Tom produced that valuable paper which Mr. Slocum read as carefully as though he had serious intentions of employing Tom.

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"That's a strong recommendation. Sorry we have no place for you. We buy a few special lines from Fort & Saxe, nice people to do business with. We could take you on for a few weeks now and then especially around the holidays."

"I've got to get steady work somewhere and pretty soon, too. Do you know of any place in town where my training would make me valuable?"

"Can't think of any. We're the only hardware store worth mentioning. The only other is Jethro Lincoln's junk shop opposite the post office."

"I wasn't sure that was a hardware store."

"That's what he calls it and he refers to us as his competitors," and Mr. Slocum's sarcasm as he used the word "competitors" was very pronounced.

"He's got a good central location," said Tom.

"Yes, and he was here before we came and had what trade there was. We've only been here twenty-five years."

"Can't you figure out to use me in some way as salesman out among the farmers, anything to make a living."

"You would never make a salesman here. You got to know the people by name and who their parents were and when they died and what they died

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of and who was at the funeral. No, no chap from New York could sell these farmers; they'd be suspicious of you from the start."

"What am I going to do?" It was almost a cry of desperation.

"Oh, there's other work to be had in a town this size, but I guess you'll have to give up the hardware business! We got all o' that and it's just about enough to take care of us nicely." There was a touch of grim humor in Mr. Slocum's voice for it was well known that he was wealthy. "No," he continued, rubbing his hands complacently, "there's no room for another hardware man in Steubenville."

Tom turned and walked out of the store like a man in a dream. He had shot his one bolt. Slowly he walked west on Main Street, the haphazard country stores on either side making no appeal to his imagination. Over and over to himself he kept asking the question, "Shall I have to give up the hardware business, shall I have to ask for work in a grocery store, a harness shop or a drug store and give up all my training? Must I give up the hardware business? Is there really no room for another hardware man in Steubenville?"

CHAPTER XVI

OPPORTUNITY

TOM tried for work at the leading grocery store, Simpkins's, and was promised work for Saturday afternoon and evening. He tried Hart's drug store, and then having started, he tried every store in town and finally the *Eagle* office. After his first call he found it unnecessary to announce his errand for everyone in town knew it. He was well received everywhere and in the most friendly spirit, in fact it was a continual surprise to him to find the proprietors of many of the shops he called on so ready to drop what they were doing and devote half an hour or more to telling him how sorry they were that they were unable to offer him encouragement. In many cases he found the shop a sort of family affair to which outsiders were not expected to annex themselves save by marriage. Tom called on the proprietors of every shop in Steubenville save one and that was the queer looking hardware shop opposite the post office. He had a loathing for that

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store and a presentiment that should he apply for work there his services would be accepted. The place was so utterly different from what it should have been. He felt he could have no pride in employment there and that unless he owned it and had the money with which to make the needed changes the "junk heap," as Mr. Slocum had aptly called it, could never be made to look like a real hardware store.

It was Friday and the Stewarts were seated about the table enjoying the evening meal. Tom, trying his best to be cheerful, had reported his utter failure in his attempts to find work. "I've been in every store in Steubenville," he said, "and there isn't a thing for me to do in the whole place. I'll have to take up farming which is something I know nothing about and don't care for. I want to stick to my own line, the hardware business."

"And you're right," said Mrs. Stewart, "and it can be brought about, too, I believe. How would it do to write to Mr. Fort and ask his advice? You ought to have the counsel of an experienced man at such a time as this."

"I'll think it over," said Tom, "but I ought to be able to solve this problem myself."

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"Oh, be a farmer," said Guy. "It's the best life of all, if you can't sell what you raise you can turn around and eat it."

"You better turn around and eat your food properly," admonished his sister, for Guy as usual had been racing. "Can't you keep from sprinkling the floor with crumbs?"

"Better take your meals in the bathtub," suggested Tom.

"Ah—h!" drawled Guy, and then to get square with his elder brother he added, "You got turned down at every store in town, didn't you?"

"Yes, I got to admit I did."

"Did you call at Jethro Lincoln's hardware emporium?"

"What! The junk shop opposite the post office? I hope I haven't got down to that yet."

"Thought you said you'd been to every store in town."

"So I have, but I don't call that a real store."

"I bet you could make a real store out of it. It's a kind of hardware store now," and Guy spoke with conviction.

That the idea was not absolutely new to Tom was shown by his answer. "Think I could, do you? I

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hoped I wouldn't have to try, but I guess that's the only chance left. Ever seen Jethro Lincoln?"

"Sure, he visited our school yesterday. Sat on the platform at assembly and then gave us a speech. Said we all ought to know Latin. Said he never went anywhere without a copy of Virgil, and a lot of stuff like that."

"I'll see him tomorrow morning. Wonder if he's got so many of his family running his junk heap that there isn't room on the pile for me?"

"Other young men have had a worse start. I hope he gives you a chance, and if he does, I want you to write Mr. Fort telling him all about it and asking his advice. Don't get out of touch with that man," advised Tom's mother.

Tom called early Saturday morning, but Mr. Jethro Lincoln was not in. However, a large, overgrown, tow-headed, freckle-faced boy of sixteen met Tom's inquiry with, "Looking for dad? He's in the blacksmith shop if he hain't finished and gone out to the farm. He was lookin' for you. My name's Bud, Bud Lincoln."

"Looking for me, what do you mean?"

"Why, he said he reckoned he'd like to know why he'd been left off your callin' list," and Bud's

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broad smile showed he appreciated his father's humor.

"Well, that's why I'm here. I don't want to slight anybody," said Tom.

"Ain't no use lookin' for work here, dad ain't got no more use for a New York clerk than a toad has for a pocketbook."

"I'm not a New York clerk, and I want to see your father."

"Better hustle then—here, out this way. He's back in the shed shoein' Lawson's gray. Mebbe he's gone to the farm."

"What, hardware store, blacksmith shop and farm?"

"Yep, an' yet we ain't got enough to do let alone takin' on city help."

Tom glanced about him as he picked his way through the clutter of odds and ends strewn about the floor, and his heart sank within him, and it actually gave him a feeling of relief to think that such a place could not possibly be in need of an additional helper. "It needs a fire more'n anything else," he thought, as he followed Bud Lincoln through the side door down an alley way to the blacksmith shop in the rear. It was not a real blacksmith shop any

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more than the store was a real hardware store, and Tom rightly guessed that a farm run by the same management could not be a real farm. To the rear of the yard back of the store was the barn in which Mr. Jethro Lincoln had erected his forge. There he stood now, tall and spare and muscular with one hand on the bellows while with the other he stirred the fire or turned his whitening horseshoe. He was so intent on his work that he paid no attention to the visitor standing in his doorway. Tom looked him over carefully; tall, lean and with an exceedingly interesting face, a man of whom much might be expected.

"Dad," called Bud above the wheeze of the bellows, "this here's that New York chap you was speakin' about, the one that's been to every store in town askin' for work. Your turn's come."

"There isn't any work for him about this place, but I want to have a good look at him. I want to see the man that has the nerve to try every place in town." Mr. Lincoln didn't take his eye off his work as he spoke nor did he glance round while the sparks flew from the anvil as stroke followed stroke on the blazing shoe. "There," he remarked, "as good a shoe as a horse needs to wear. Nails, Bud!" he

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called, as he caught the gray's hoof between his knees and began working away with the rasp. In short order the shoe was in place and to Tom's inexperienced eye it looked like a good job. Dropping the shoed hoof, much to the relief of the gray, Mr. Lincoln straightened himself to his full height and looked in Tom's direction. Tom liked the look of the man though Mr. Lincoln's gaze was deliberate and penetrating. "How are you, Mr. Stewart," he said. "Had any luck?"

"No," replied Tom, "and I've got to get work somewhere."

"Wish I could help you, young man. I never had a stroke of luck in my life myself, but I'd like mighty well to help somebody else strike it right. There isn't enough to do in that shop to keep Bud busy. 'Course you tried Slocum & Stilwell's; they got pretty near all the hardware business in town."

"Yes, I tried them, but couldn't something be done with your hardware store?"

"Have you seen it?"

"I just walked through it."

"Isn't that enough?"

"I don't know what you've got in the way of stock."

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"You say you've been in the hardware business with Fort & Saxe?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you've seen my store?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you're willing to go to work in my store?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you're plum crazy, or you're desperate," and Mr. Lincoln smiled broadly.

"Yes, I'm desperate."

"Then I've a good mind to hire you, but come to think of it I couldn't pay you any wages because I haven't anything to pay with. The blacksmith shop doesn't pay, the farm doesn't pay and the hardware store doesn't pay, take 'em all together they're a poor lot."

"See here," said Tom desperately, "I got to work and all I know is the hardware business. Let me take your shop and see what I can do with it. I can't make it any worse than it is now."

"That's true, and that'd give me a chance to run the farm or the blacksmith shop, but you can't do anything without money. It takes money to make money."

"Let me have a try. If I can make anything out of it, well and good. If not, there's no harm done."

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"All right, son, and I wish you luck. If you can make a go of it, you're a better business man than I am. When do you want to start?"

"Right now."

"Go to it. It's all yours," and Mr. Jethro Lincoln stepped on the hub of his dilapidated farm wagon and vaulted into the seat. "Look around and get acquainted. Bud'll show you all there is to it. By the way, let me see your recommendation. Well, I never! You were with Fort & Saxe and they certainly think well of you." Mr. Lincoln handed back the paper and drove off. Tom watched him swing down the alley and into the street. "He wasn't dead sure I'd been with Fort & Saxe till he read the recommendation; thought no one but a fool would have taken a job in his junk shop without pay. Maybe I'm a fool, but I'll show him! Come on, Bud, show me your store."

CHAPTER XVII

THE JUNK SHOP

TOM and Bud walked down the alley to get to the front of the store.

"It's quicker going this way than scramblin' over all that mess in the store," remarked Bud.

"Seems to me I'd have cleaned up long ago if I'd been you," commented Tom.

"Tain't no use, nobody comes to our store, anyway. Father says it ain't no use botherin'."

"Show me everything, and we'll see if it isn't worth bothering." Tom spoke confidently, but as they turned out of the alley and faced the store something of the confidence left him. The two show-windows were hopelessly dirty, and what had been gilded lettering on the glass read,

THE INCO N HARD ARE CO.

Last year's fly specks were over the glass and woodwork. Fly paper dating from last summer still

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reposed in one corner of the right-hand window. In each window a badly bent gas fixture staggered from the ceiling and on one an old coat had been hung. In the display spaces of the windows were several empty boxes, a rusty gun, an old-fashioned ice-cream freezer, a coil of wire and several broken door-knobs. The doors opened on squeaky hinges as the two entered, and smoke from the disorderly cylinder stove in the center of the store filled their nostrils and made their eyes water.

"Something the matter with the draught," said Tom.

"It always acts that way in the mornin'."

"How do you expect customers to stand this smoke?"

"Don't expect 'em."

"Let's fix the pipe."

"Now?"

"Yes, now."

"What's the hurry?"

"Isn't it time something was done?"

"You can't work with those clothes on."

"Get me your father's overalls."

"All right, they're in back, wait a minute."

While Bud felt his way around in the rear of the

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store trying to locate his father's overalls, Tom had a chance to take a good look around. To do this he opened the front doors to let out some of the smoke, and though the spring air was chill it was bright with sunshine and in from the distance floated the cheerful note of a song sparrow.

With eyes red from the pungent smoke, Tom viewed The Lincoln Hardware Store and began to realize what he had undertaken. "It's been a real store once," he thought, "but now, now, it is a junk shop. Slocum was right."

Tom's eyes swept the walls on either side with their rows of drawers which had once been filled and labeled with a sample of the contents affixed just below the knob of each drawer. Now some of the drawers were half open, a few had their specimens of contents in place but which, Tom was to find later, did not represent their present contents, and some of the drawers had been removed altogether, showing gaps in the ranks which contributed to the general slovenly appearance.

Below the shelves were bins and in a few of these were nails of several sizes, and on the opposite side of the store the bins had evidently been used for seed but were not replenished with stock for this season's

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trade. Down one side of the store and in front of the nail bins ran a line of show cases, the glass of which was dirty as the windows and the contents of which, knives, scissors, revolvers and a few ancient novelties, were timeworn and a little rusty.

But if the front of the store was discouraging, in the shadow of the rear lurked the real dragon of despair, for there, scattered over the floor and piled up indiscriminately reposed the tail ends of many old jobs, old unsalable lines, stoves, washing-machines, wheelbarrows, trouser-stretchers, coiled fence wire, stump-pullers, and more meaningless material than Tom had ever seen in one place before. Though the door was now open, the spiteful stove continued to manufacture smoke faster than the incoming spring air could drive it out. Tom glanced at the zig-zag pipe that should have carried the smoke to the rear of the building and out through a vent over one of the rear windows. That crooked, aimless pipe seemed so characteristic of the whole place that Tom's anger rose as he viewed it and still rubbed his stinging eyes. "It's got to come down, it's going to come down now!" he exclaimed.

"Here's dad's overalls," came Bud's voice through the smoke at the rear of the store.

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"Give them to me," and Tom's voice had a peculiar ring.

"Now, you, Bud, your father told me I could do as I pleased in this store. Dump that fire."

"What?"

"Dump that fire. It's almost April and we're going to work so hard we won't need any heat from that stove."

"Gee!" said Bud; but he dumped the fire.

In a few minutes the stove was out in the rear yard cooling off and the stovepipe was rapidly coming down, the rear windows were opened and the smoke drew through the place and out into the street.

"On fire?" queried an unhurried voice just below Tom's elbow. Tom turned on his stepladder as he handed Bud another length of the offending stovepipe, to see the deliberate form of Sam Swift. Sam was of age but his mind had lingered somewhat behind his years. He had been applying for work as long as he could remember doing anything so that it was no longer a matter of any special significance or interest to him, it was his one steady occupation. He wore his single suspender or gallus with ease and comfort and hitched his trousers with great regularity. He was at peace with the world and yet he

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harbored the thought that he really wanted to work, and it might be that with proper training and the growing that was taking place, though slowly, he might at length become a man. Tom did not see all this, but he had undertaken a big job and he was alert for help of any kind.

"'Lo, Sam," said Bud.

"'Lo, Bud."

There was no introduction.

"Want to work?" The voice was Tom's.

"Sure, that's why I come here. Hearn tell you was startin' up business here."

"Who told you?"

"Don't know zactly, everybody's talkin' about it."

"Well, I'll be—" Tom was at a loss for words.
"Didn't know it myself yet."

"But the town knows. Martha Acker seed you throw out that old stove an' she took it thet meant business, so I called. I been lookin' for a opportunity all my life an' opportunities like this don't hang head down by the feet on every tree."

"Can you work?"

"Sure."

"Want to learn the hardware business hard enough to work for small wages at the start?"

THE JUNK SHOP

"Sure."

"Then start in right now. Four dollars a week and more when you're worth it, and you get fired first time I catch you loafing."

"Go on taking down this pipe. Bud, you stay with him."

"Yes, sir."

"Well," thought Tom, "I've made a start at no wages for myself in a junk heap and have had the nerve to hire a man, and I'm going to make good or bust."

"Wasn't I the quick Johnny on the spot, to get here before the rest an' git the job," Sam chattered to Bud in a cloud of soot. "Oh, I'm the boy all right when it comes to landing a job! I tell you when it's rainin' duck soup, you don't find me goin' around with a fork."

"Better mind what you're doin' or the boss'll fire you," said Bud, wiping the soot out of his eyes.

"He is rather hard, ain't he?"

"Hard as nails," said Bud.

CHAPTER XVIII

GETTING STARTED

TOM went to work on the dirty show-window at once leaving Bud and Sam cleaning up the dirt that resulted from removing the cylinder stove. "I can't do much now, but I can make it clean, at any rate," he said, as with a Stilson wrench he straightened out the gas fixtures and then removed everything else from the front show spaces. As he worked he kept turning over the situation, trying to answer the question what to do next. "There isn't a complete line of anything in the whole shop and about the only thing I can do will be to have a rummage sale. Never heard of a hardware rummage sale, but that's what it's got to be. If I can get in ready money for some of this old junk, I can buy new stock that will sell." As Tom worked he was not aware that many people who passed watched him curiously and that some passed and repassed without taking their eyes off that new chap from

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the city. "I'll have to advertise," he said to himself, "and the *Eagle* comes out on Friday. I'll call on the editor, Mr. Tuthill; guess I'll do it now; better take off these overalls. No I won't, the town's going to get used to seeing me in working clothes." A few minutes later he was in the *Eagle* office. "Yes," he said to the clerk, "I want to see Mr. Tuthill."

"He's busy," replied the clerk, who knew perfectly well who Tom was and was pleased to give that answer to "that New York guy," as he called him.

"But I want to see him about advertising in the *Eagle*."

"Oh, wait a minute!"

Advertising in the *Eagle* did not come so readily that one could be domineering even with a New York person entirely strange to Steubenville. Tom was shown promptly into the inner office. "Good-morning, Mr. Tuthill."

"Good-morning, Mr. Stewart. I understand you have taken over The Lincoln Hardware Company."

"Why, not exactly, I've got a job in that place, but I haven't bought it."

"Nobody would accuse you of buying it, but if you

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take it over and make anything out of it, it ought to be yours, for it's nothing now."

"Mr. Tuthill, I'm going to make a real hardware store out of that shop, and I believe in advertising. I've got very little money, but I'm going to push the business all I can. I'm going to start with a sort of hardware rummage sale, clean out all the old trash by offering it at what it's worth and no more and then I'm going to put in clean up-to-date stock, but I've got to advertise it."

"That rummage sale is a good idea, but, Mr. Stewart, do you realize the size of the job you've taken hold of?"

"I've worked for the strictest hardware boss in the business. Guess I know what I'm up against."

"Well, guess you do, and I admire your courage. What do you want of me?"

"I want publicity, all I can get for the least money and time to pay so I can take care of your bill when it comes due."

There was not so much advertising that came unsolicited to the *Eagle* that Mr. Tuthill could afford to slight this customer, and there were not many on his books who manifested much anxiety as to the payment of their bills when they should come due.

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Mr. Tuthill was interested. "Tell you what I'll do as a starter. You make up a half-page ad and I'll make a leading news item of your new start and comment editorially on your entry into Steubenville business. What's more, I'll take pay for this first ad in trade. I'll find something in that old stock I can use. That'll help out for the first time and after that you won't find our regular rates too high for the service we give and I'll let you have whatever time is necessary. I believe you'll make good. You're the only business man in this town that ever admitted he believed in advertising. I'll help you all I can. Now give me the main points for your Saturday sale so I can write it up. I'll help you lay out that ad, too." Mr. Tuthill was plainly interested and disposed to help.

"There's stock in that store so old it could vote and yet the prices are just what they were when the goods were new. I'm going to run ten-cent, twenty-five-cent, fifty-cent and dollar counters with leaders in all cases and not an item on the list that isn't full value for the price asked. For instance, in the dollar list will be found ice-cream freezers formerly priced at four dollars, a washing-machine that sold at five and quite a number of the items formerly priced

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from three to five dollars. With these will be found lots of other goods that were not so high in price, but which will be marked down correspondingly. The same idea applies to the other lines and if the people respond they can have anything in the shop at proportionately low prices. It's a job lot proposition. There isn't any up-to-date stock in the store."

"You've the right idea, Mr. Stewart, and I'll help boom this first sale of yours, it looks right to me, but you must follow this up with good live stock," commented Mr. Tuthill.

"Depend on me for that, this is only to be the beginning." When Tom returned to The Lincoln Hardware Company's store the boys had removed the last section of the offending stovepipe and were ready for further orders. These came fast enough to suit them or any other business men. "Line up every article in this store that ever sold for three dollars or more. Right down the center of the store. Start in the back and work toward the front."

"But, Mr. Stewart, we never do anything with that stock in the rear of the store," complained Bud.

"I don't care what you never do, now start that junk out this way, quick!"

There was no mistaking that order, and though

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one of these helpers was older than Tom and the other but little younger, they were untrained and that marked the great difference; they took their orders from a man who knew what he was doing.

In the midst of the work a shadow darkened the door and Tom thought for a moment it might be a customer and he shuddered at the prospect, for in this place he did not know where to find a single thing and, what was worse, he felt sure Bud knew no more about the stock than himself. However, it was no customer. It was Mr. Lincoln.

"What's all this?" he called out to the workers. "What's going on here?"

"Getting this stock ready to sell," answered Tom showing a grimy face for a moment as he struggled out of the semi-darkness of the rear store carrying a folding stepladder and an ice-cream freezer, both of ancient date.

"To sell? Where you going to sell 'em? Going to ship them out of town?"

"No, going to sell them right here in Steubenville."

"It can't be done; some of these goods have been here waiting for customers pretty near twenty years."

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"But nobody knew it—just you wait."

"Oh, I'll wait, son, and I'll wait another twenty years before you clean out that stuff."

Here Bud stepped up to his father and whispered something. "So you've put on extra help already? I can't allow that; that'll cost money and I told you I hadn't even enough to pay you let alone another helper."

"I'm going to pay him," and Tom thought his words had a bold ring as he remembered his scant savings. "I'm going to pay him. You gave me a free hand here and it's up to me."

"But, Mr. Stewart, I can't allow you to throw away your money here. It's impossible to make anything out of this store. I've tried it long and hard. Think of Slocum & Stilwell. They'll drive you out of town."

"Leave it to me. We'll drive them out, maybe."

"Mr. Stewart, you're a young business man; you've had good training; maybe we can do something. I'm not much of a business man, got too many ideas, but maybe we can do something. I'll pile in and help soon as I do a little blacksmith work."

"Couldn't you drop the blacksmith end of the busi-

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ness till we make a go of the hardware store?" suggested Tom.

"I'll think about it. I like the work but it never did pay. I might sell the forge; old Pop Skinner was dickering with me for it three years ago; he might be ready to buy about now. I'll try him out next time we meet. I got a mule to shoe right after dinner."

All business in Steubenville stopped between twelve and one for the reason that all proprietors went home then to the main meal of the day. Tom went home also.

"I've been hired for nothing a week and have taken on help at four dollars a week," he reported at the dinner table.

"You better come back with me to high school and learn a little arithmetic," suggested Guy.

"Tell us the whole story," said Mrs. Stewart.

"I guess we'll have to live on my chickens for a while after all," said Mary.

CHAPTER XIX

REMOVING AN OLD SIGN

WHEN Tom returned to his place of business he found quite a commotion going on in front of The Lincoln Hardware Company's store. There stood a balky mule, and alongside in perspiration and despair stood its owner, and alongside of him in calm contemplation stood Mr. Lincoln.

"There's the baste, Mr. Lincoln, an' ye can shoe him whin ye git ready."

"When he gets ready, I reckon. My shop's in the rear, Mr. Murphy, if you'll lead your horse in I'll shoe him with neatness and dispatch."

"There's the baste, I say, delivered to your door an' my responsibility ends."

"Your responsibility may end, Mr. Murphy, but mine doesn't begin till you land your horse in my shop."

"Fergit that 'horse' an' call the baste phwat it is, a plain mule."

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The little crowd was intensely interested in this controversy and much advice was freely offered to the participants. "Take his old shoes off, Murphy, he wants a new pair."

"Is she balkin', Mr. Murphy?"

"Ain't he goin' to move, Murph?"

"Is it tied? Why don't you let him go?"

"Yes, Mr. Murphy, lead it round to the forge, jest lead it."

"Why don't you beat him?"

"I did beat him, you idiot."

"You didn't beat it hard enough."

"I beat him with the shovel."

"Wouldn't she move?"

"Reared up some."

"Beat her some more."

In desperation Mr. Murphy left his talk with Mr. Lincoln and proceeded to chastise the mule. The animal lifted his hind feet somewhat, his eyes had a curious glint in them and his ears were flattened against his skull.

"There go your whiffletrees," called Sam Swift, who was enjoying the spectacle.

"He'll use up that outfit down to the uttermost farthing," commented Mr. Lincoln.

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"Try leading it, she may change her mind," came an eager suggestion from Bud.

"No, he won't lead, ye phool. I was thrying that whin he decided he'd never move ag'in."

"He's trying to read The Lincoln Hardware sign, but them missin' letters bothers him. Spell it out fer him an' he'll move on," suggested one local wit.

"Tickle his hind laigs," suggested the thoughtful Sam.

"Tickle thim yerself," answered Mr. Murphy.

"I did it once last year," said Sam, "it was another mule."

"Did it make him move?"

"Not exactly, but he made me move."

Mr. Murphy took the suggestion seriously and as he tickled the mule's legs with his whip the creature drew back his lips and bit viciously in his direction but did not budge so far as his feet were concerned.

It was new and interesting to Tom and he wondered what the outcome would be. "It's as good as a show," he thought. "I wonder what they'll try next."

"Twist her tail," advised a patient looking little drug salesman from Philadelphia.

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"Twist it yerself, if ye knows how," urged Mr. Murphy.

The little salesman seemed to regret that he had spoken, but having shown so much mule knowledge before so large an audience he found it difficult to withdraw gracefully from the white light of publicity, so rolling up the sleeve of his right arm he approached the rear quarters of the mule and with thumb and forefinger adjusted as though to pick a spring blossom he attempted to seize the viciously switching rat-tail. There was a spasmodic lifting of the hind quarters of the little beast and the man from Philadelphia staggered back among the crowd. The blow was a glancing one, but it was several minutes before the tail-twister regained his breath and consciousness in Jones's drug store, and as yet the mule hadn't budged from the stand he had taken.

Sam had another thought born of experience. "Build a fire under her," he suggested.

"Good!" came from several.

"She'll sure move then," said Bud.

Many willing hands gathered fuel till a threatening pile was thrown into place under the stubborn creature. It was noted and commented on that great caution was exercised in approaching the terminal

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end of that mule. A little kerosene helped a good start, and the mule began to show signs of anxiety. His expression seemed to indicate that someone had taken an unfair advantage of him and he figured out his next move accordingly and moved forward just enough to bring the wagon over the blaze, then he froze to the place once more.

“Look out, Murphy!”

“There goes your wagon!”

“Call out the fire department!”

Before the fire could be scattered the old dry flooring of the wagon had commenced to blaze but was speedily extinguished. However, one eager citizen had turned in a fire alarm and the chemical engine now appeared. The fire was out but there stood the mule. “Put him out!” called several who were enjoying the free exhibition to the full and were well pleased to add novelties to the show. The idea was well received by the department and Chief Brown, stationed his men at points of vantage and turned on a fine chemical stream. Water might have failed, it may have been the dilute sulphuric acid that accomplished the desired end, but be that as it may, the mule surrendered completely and seemed to forget he had ever treated himself to an obstinate streak.

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"I don't think I want to shoe that mule," said Mr. Lincoln.

"But he's got to be shod," insisted Mr. Murphy.

"Then I'll lend you the forge but I won't shoe that mule."

"But you got to."

"That mule o' yours was obstinate, wasn't he?"

"Sure, but phwat's that to do with it?"

"He was obstinate but I'm determined. See the difference?"

"No, you're two av a kind," and Mr. Murphy swore to himself and then to the mule and finally walked down to Rosse's corner and held an indignation meeting all by himself for about five minutes, and then he came back to his mule, jumped in his wagon and drove home.

"There isn't any money in blacksmithing," said Mr. Lincoln philosophically.

"Turn your blacksmith shop into a garage, or, better still, cut it out and stick to hardware," urged Tom.

"No money for a garage," said Mr. Lincoln slowly.

"Sell your forge, take down your sign, and let's stick to one thing."

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"Mr. Stewart, you're a business man if you are a youngster. I'll think over what you say."

"Do you want me to show what I think of your running that blacksmith shop in addition to the hardware store and the farm?"

"Certainly, go ahead."

Tom stepped over to the alley where the horse-shoeing sign hung on a pole and climbing on the fence alongside reached over and unhooked the painted horse and brought it down. "When another sign goes up there it'll have an automobile painted on it, but that'll be after we've got a first-class hardware store going full blast," he said.

"That settles it, Tom, I'm with you. That blacksmith shop never did pay but I always did like shoeing a horse."

CHAPTER XX

SYSTEM

NOW tell me your plan," said Mr. Lincoln next morning. "Now that we're going to run this hardware store, I want to help. You've got ideas from working with a good house, and though I was at it before you were born I'm not ashamed to take orders. I'd just like to succeed once before I die."

"I've only one plan and that is to sell and then to keep on selling."

"Sounds good to me."

"First a grand clearing out sale and then new stock and an up-to-date store, everything new. Show-windows changed every week, advertisements in the paper, and use all the sidewalk space we can."

"But it'll take money."

"It'll take some money and lots of work. I've two hundred and fifty dollars in the bank and I'm

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sure Fort & Saxe will give us a line of credit, but we've got to work."

"Plenty of elbow grease and shoe polish make quick sales, as the apple woman said," remarked Bud who had been listening attentively.

"You put your elbow grease to work on polishing that stove," said Tom sharply.

"That boy o' mine never took kindly to study or work, hope you can get something out o' him. I've tried to get him interested in Latin, always have a copy of Virgil with me. Latin is a complete education. It's done more for me than anything else," and Mr. Lincoln drew a much-thumbed book from his pocket. "I'd like to get you interested in Latin, Mr. Stewart, it opens up a whole new world, helps you forget all about business."

"I don't want to forget business just now, I want to remember all I ever knew about hardware at any rate."

"Very well, we'll let Virgil wait a while, no doubt you're right, but it's wonderful what that little book means to me. There's just one other thing I had on my mind to talk about, I hope you're not one of these scientific management cranks."

"Don't know much about that, wish I did. All I

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know is what I learned at Fort & Saxe's and there was a reason for everything they did, whether it was cutting down expenses or increasing sales."

"Glad to hear that. One of those efficiency cranks once wanted to try on me what he called injecting new life into my business. Business needed new life all right, but he wasn't the man to put it there. There's only one way to manage a business and that is to manage it. I can say that, even though I never did manage well. I know what's the matter with me, too many irons in the fire, Latin and all that; yet life's so interesting can't keep my hands off and there's a lot more things I'd like to tackle besides what's bothering me now. But that crank, he says, 'Efficiency, mental efficiency, trains your mind. Bet you can't remember the date o' the battle of Waterloo. Every child ought to know that.' "

" 'No, I can't,' I answered short enough, and I didn't care a rap, for the fellow was so cocksure he was a regular Moses to lead me out of darkness into light, that I felt like quoting at him from Virgil. 'Listen,' said he, 'you should fix that date in your mind. Now, how to fix it? Just follow my system. Now anybody can remember the twelve Apostles. Just add half their number to 'em. That gives you

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eighteen. Multiply by a hundred, there you have eighteen hundred. Go back again to the twelve Apostles, take one sixth of their number, then one twelfth and to that add the total number of Apostles, which gives you fifteen, this with the eighteen already obtained will give you a grand total of eighteen hundred and fifteen or the date of the battle of Waterloo, and in a similar way by my system you can fix any date in your mind.' And he wanted to systematize my store."

"I don't know anything about that sort of system," laughed Tom. "My system is work, keep what people want, right prices and advertise so they'll know you've got what they want, and then more work."

"Well, I've made up my mind to work with you and stick to one thing for a while till we see if there is anything in your plan. But if you spend your money and put in your work and get a line of credit from Fort & Saxe, it's got to be a partnership, you ought to have half of anything there may be in it, you're taking half the risk."

"All right," said Tom a little dubiously. "I'll write Mr. Fort about that. If he gives us a line of credit, he may want to have us incorporate. He

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prefers a stock-company to a partnership. I heard him say so."

"I don't care how you fix it so long as you make it go."

When Tom got home that night he wrote two letters. One was to Mr. Fort and he explained the whole situation as to The Lincoln Hardware Company. He went into details and described Slocum & Stilwell's place and the stock they carried. He asked Mr. Fort's advice as to what stock he should carry. He also asked for a line of credit and letters of recommendation to other wholesale hardware concerns in New York. The other letter was to the person, a Mr. Crawford, who at Tom's suggestion had loaned the stone hatchet exhibition to Fort & Saxe, over two years ago. He begged the loan of the same antiques for exhibition purposes at The Lincoln Hardware Company's store in Steubenville. He received a favorable answer to this last letter by the end of the week, but did not get so prompt a reply from Mr. Fort.

That was a trying week, but the hard work made it pass rapidly enough. Friday brought out the big announcement in the *Eagle* and Saturday, the day of the big sale, dawned at length.

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Tom could not tell what to expect. He knew he was being talked about, he knew the promised sale was being discussed, he also knew that both the sale and himself were being well laughed at. "Let 'em laugh all they want if they only keep on talking about my shop," he said. The laugh that irritated most, in fact the only one that really bothered him, came from Mr. Slocum whom he met occasionally on the street. "Trying to make something out of nothing, hey? It's no use, Mr. Stewart, I told you there's no room for another hardware man in Steubenville."

"What would you have me do then. I've tried for work at every store in town."

"That's your business, Mr. Stewart, but another hardware store is impossible."

"Yes, Mr. Slocum, that's my business and I'm going to stick to it."

CHAPTER XXI

OPENING DAY

SATURDAY morning Tom was an early riser and not a store had opened, not a key had been turned in any commercial lock on Main Street, so far as he could see, when he opened the doors of The Lincoln Hardware Company's store. The town looked hopelessly quiet and lifeless, and Tom wondered if the coming day could possibly have any promise in it for his new venture.

It was a gray dawn, but his old friend the song sparrow opened up with a cheerful note that somehow helped him get started. "If I lose this time, I'll try again," he said to himself as he surveyed his show-windows. These were piled high with merchandise, the right-hand window being devoted to ten-cent articles and the left to twenty-five-cent articles. One sign read:

ANY ARTICLE IN THIS WINDOW 10c.

The other read:

ANY ARTICLE IN THIS WINDOW 25c.

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There was hardly any article in either window that had not been priced formerly at twice its present figure. "My! what bargains they would have been ten years ago, but what a lot of lemons they are now!" sighed Tom. "There's good show space on the sidewalk and no laws that I know of for not using it," he thought, and out onto the pavement he carried some of the larger pieces. There were several old lawn mowers, a plow, three stepladders and a dozen single items that took up a lot of space in the store and which looked less in the way on the sidewalk. He had been at work an hour before Mr. Lincoln arrived. "You are the greatest hustler I ever ran across," he remarked as he looked about. "The place never looked like this before, Tom. I believe we can make a go of it."

"That's what we're going to do and don't you forget it!"

"I'm so used to being a failure that I think I've got the habit. I wonder if there isn't something in that?" queried Mr. Lincoln, "the habit of failing or the habit of succeeding."

"I believe you have that straight. Now Fort & Saxe made a success of everything they tackled. They had a habit of succeeding."

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"I'm going to break my old habit right now," said Mr. Lincoln smiling. "I never did like it—you've done wonders with this store. There'll be a crowd here later."

"Wish I was sure of that. Haven't seen a sign of anybody yet."

"They'll be here all right. You got their curiosity excited. They think you're a freak and I'm a joke. There'll be a lot that'll come here to have a good laugh. Even Slocum & Stilwell have been talking about us to everybody since you came here. Slocum laughed and tapped his head to one of his customers. I saw it though he thought my back was turned, and he said: 'Going to the big hardware sale Saturday?' Oh, they'll be here! Steubenville doesn't often have a free show."

"Hope they come, but there's no signs of 'em yet."

"What do you expect? It isn't seven o'clock. Wait till about nine when they begin coming in from the hills."

"Do you expect anybody from out of town?"

"Why that's your best hold, a rummage hardware sale, any kind of a rummage sale will bring them in thick as flies! I thought you knew what you were

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doing when you used that word in your ad and gave you credit for it."

"It sounded like a word that would describe our stock better than 'junk.' "

"No, it's the one word in the whole dictionary that hits the farmers round here right between the eyes, you'll see!"

"Hope so. Hello, Bud, you'll have to get here earlier than this, same to you, Sam. When I say seven I mean seven!" Tom spoke sharply.

"It's only ten minutes past now," said Bud rather sulkily.

"Ten minutes past won't do. Seven o'clock or I'll get men who can be here on time and I won't speak about it again."

"I like your way of getting things done," said Mr. Lincoln. "That boy, Bud, has worked harder for you this week than he ever did for me since he's been here."

"This isn't going to be any place for loafing," replied Tom energetically.

"Say, he's a hard boss," grunted Bud under his breath to Sam. But somehow there was the beginning of a feeling of pride both in the new boss and the old store.

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"He's a driver," admitted Sam.

The sale was advertised to commence at ten in the morning and the shop was in readiness long before that hour. Down the middle of the store ran a solid row of the bulkier articles which could not be handled well over the counters. The first half of the main counter to the left was a ten-cent counter and the second half was devoted to twenty-five-cent articles. A temporary counter on the right of the store carried a collection of fifty-cent articles. Mr. Lincoln and Tom were the salesmen, Bud and Sam were to do the lugging and wrapping, most of the customers would take their purchases with them, but if not, prompt deliveries were promised and arranged for.

The greatest novelty was a cashier desk and window, with Mary seated in state ready to make change promptly. "It all looks like business," said Mr. Lincoln. "Wonder why I couldn't have done it myself, but I never could. Tom, you're a wonder! I feel sure we're going to make a go of it."

"But there hasn't been the first sign of a customer," complained the overanxious Tom.

"Patience, Mr. Stewart," and Mr. Lincoln pulled out an ancient silver watch. "It's barely eight

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o'clock. Half the stores in town haven't opened yet."

It was fully nine o'clock when Tom stepped to the front door to take one more look at his show windows, when he noted a farm wagon which stopped several doors west of his own shop. The driver slowly dismounted and hitched his team to the rail provided for that purpose. Then he returned to the wagon and assisted in guiding a very bulky woman in safety to the sidewalk.

"There, Maria, guess we're on time. It's Lincoln's old place, but they've a new man from York a-runnin' it. Don't let on we wants to buy anythin', jest drapped in to look around. Thet's why I hitched up in front o' Byrum's. It don't look like we was in no hurry to buy nothin'."

"You allus wuz clever, Hiram, an' it ain't likely no York sharper kin git the best o' you."

"I allus knows what I wants before I goes into any sech place an' I knows what I'm a-goin' to pay for it, too."

Tom caught most of this nasal conversation and the final subdued remark from the lady spoken to as "Maria." "Thet's him. I know every mortal in this town. He looks knowin'."



“He noted a farm wagon which stopped several doors west of his own shop”

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"They think I'm a sharper," and Tom smiled to himself. "I've got to make 'em believe in me and in the goods and in the store. I can do it, too."

Another country vehicle had drawn up and hitched to the same rail and Tom was sure there was another strange wagon coming down the street. He walked back into the store wondering who might be the first customer and what he would buy. A moment later he heard Mr. Lincoln's hearty voice, "Hello, Hi, glad to see you, it's a long drive from Hickory Tree. You must have gotten up before breakfast."

"Up with the chickens, Jethro. As the feller says, 'early to bed an' early to rise, hurts a man's hearing an' ruins his eyes.' Ha, ha, ha!"

"You always did have a joke," replied Mr. Lincoln patiently.

"Say, Jeth, ain't you takin' a chanct havin' doin's with thet York feller?"

"No, not in the least, straight as a string and honest as the day."

"You watch out. I seen him, he's up an' comin'."

"That's what I need, Hi. I've been a dead one too long."

"Only one thing the matter with you, Jeth."

"What's that?"

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"Virgil! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Never you mind! I'd rather be poor and keep the little education I've managed to scrape together."

"Yep, but Latin an' business don't mix. Does the city sharp know any Latin?"

"Don't think so, but don't you call him a sharp, Hi, he's a fine young man and a hustler."

"Well, remember I gave you a warnin'."

"Want him to wait on you?"

"I ruther you would, but Maria wants to get a good look at him. Say, Jeth, we'll talk prices to him, but when it comes to buyin' we'll buy from you."

CHAPTER XXII

THE FIRST SALE

GET this man if you can, Mr. Stewart. He's an old timer but he knows everybody back in the hills, and if you land him you've made a good start with the hill trade." Mr. Lincoln spoke hurriedly and under his breath, then he introduced Tom to the prospective customers. "This is Mrs. Maria Johnson and this is Mr. Hiram Johnson, old friends of mine."

"Glad to know you and hope we can be of service to you. If Mr. Lincoln's friends will stand by us, we'll have as good a hardware store for its size as there is in the State. I want Steubenville to be proud of us."

"Steubenville is a likely town, young feller, er, Mr. Stewart."

"Now never mind the 'Mister.' I feel as though I'd been here as long as anybody. I've had to work all my life and I hope the people round here are going to take me in as though I belonged here."

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It was evident Tom had struck the right note, for Hiram turned to Maria and whispered, "He's the right sort, a likely young chap," but Maria shook her head dubiously. Tom caught her look. "Mrs. Johnson," he said, "I hope you can find time to stop in and see my mother, on the north road, the old Southerland cottage. She's something of an invalid, but she'd be glad to see you and get acquainted. You could cheer her up, I know. She loves the country, we all do, and you must meet Mary, she's playing at cashier today," and when his back was turned for a minute he was conscious that Maria was whispering to Hiram. He could not hear it but she was saying, "A likely young feller, I wonder if he is a Presbyterian."

"We've got everything priced here, Mr. Johnson, so you can just look around and take your pick. First come, first served."

"That's so," and Mr. Johnson gazed at the stock approvingly. Then he continued, "Some ten years ago you people got in some firemen's helmets fer our department. I accounted fer eleven o' 'em, but as there wuz twelve in the lot I allus reckoned there must be one extry helmet a-layin' round. I been agoin' to ask if it wuz fer sale fer several years.

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They sold original at four thirty-five but as they only cost Jethro three ninety, he buyin' by wholesale, I thought there wuz too much goin' to profit."

"Are you a member of the fire department?" asked Tom with interest.

"I wuz then, an' I allus wanted one o' them hats."

"Well, Mr. Johnson, we've got that hat and the price is one dollar and I'm glad you came in time to get first chance at it." As Tom dug the desired article out of its hiding-place, for it had not been considered worthy of room in the sale, Hiram turned to Maria. "A likely young feller," he whispered, "a mighty likely young feller, if he do come from York City."

"That's what I wuz a-tellin' you, Hiram, you allus gits your ideas from me. And what's more, I'm goin' to call on his mother, she must be lonely, poor soul."

Tom put Sam at wrapping up that helmet and turned in the first dollar representing the first sale made by the new partnership. "That was easy," he thought. "Now Mr. Fort would say true salesmanship commences after the customer has purchased what he came for." Then turning to the case in

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hand, he said, "Mrs. Johnson, did you see the price we put on that washing-machine?"

"I ain't especial interested in washin'-machines, it do take more time a-settin' them up to wash than doin' the washin' by hand, as I allus said to my son's wife Mirandy, she havin' one. But they wuz a meat-grinder or chopper or somethin' thet caught my eye here about two years ago. It wuz three dollars, an' I says then I'll wait till the price gits right."

"It's one of the leaders on our dollar counter. Here it is—in perfect working order—grinds three sizes, just as well as when the price was three dollars."

"Hiram, do look at thet meat-chopper. I reckon I can afford it at one dollar. Mr. Stewart here tells me it's all right."

"Well, if he says so, go ahead an' git it. Jethro's struck it right this time. He's got a real likely feller workin' for him this time fer sure."

"Now, Mr. Johnson, don't be in a hurry. I want you to feel at home in our store. Look around, the price is on everything. And Mrs. Johnson, come over here before you go and see Mary a minute and don't forget what I say about stopping on your way past our house."

THE FIRST SALE

"Mary, this is Mrs. Hiram Johnson, and she's promised to call on mother," said Tom as he led Mrs. Johnson up to the cashier's desk.

"I'll sure stop. Miss Mary, this is my old man—yes, we're goin' to stop an' git acquainted. Yes, we pass by your house twice a week, only once a week in winter."

"We'll be very glad to have you drop in, I'm sure," said Mary, "and perhaps you can tell me what to feed my chickens to make them lay."

So a pleasant country friendship was founded and Tom had secured the best possible advertiser for the hill trade.

Customers were now coming in well enough to suit even Tom's ambitious desires. Most of them were interested in the ten and twenty-five-cent counters, some stopped and made selections from the fifty-cent counter, but all wanted to see everything. Some had come to laugh, but there was a business-like air about the place that made laughter inappropriate. Nearly all managed to get a good look at Tom and many contrived to have a short talk with him even where no purchases were made. Tom did his level best, and Jethro, who knew everybody by name, held a regular reception. The cheaper articles went rapidly

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for the prices were attractive, but the larger pieces were called for mostly by the out-of-town or hill people and though they went more slowly, they were going. It was almost noon when Tom noted a large, round-faced colored man as he hesitatingly entered the door. He seemed in search of something but of two minds as to whether he had found the place he was looking for.

Tom approached, for as the noon hour drew near his customers had thinned down to a few women, who were weeding out treasures from the novelty vantage of six years ago, and a group of farmers discussing the merits of a line of heavy razors such as their fathers had used before them.

"I'se jes lookin' round, sah. I'se jes lookin' round. I specks I'll see what I'se lookin' fo' if it's heah."

"All right, if it's anything in hardware we'll be glad to take care of your wants."

"It ain't zactly hardware, sir, kase I'se in de ministry, I'se not in business."

"Well, perhaps if you tell me what you're lookin' for I can help you out."

"I scussly think yo' has one o' dem here or I'd see it layin' round, kase dey's tolerable showy."

THE FIRST SALE

"Maybe we got it downstairs." Tom knew, or thought he knew, that everything he had was in the store, but he was beginning to wonder what was on this cautious customer's mind. "Tell me what it is and if we've got it, it's yours at a bargain price."

"I speck I bettah say what I'se lookin' fo' so you'll know. Yo' don't happen to hab no second-hand pulpit, does yo'?"

Tom wanted to laugh, but when he considered his stock and the old fireman's helmet it didn't seem so funny after all. "Wait a minute," he managed to say. "I'll see how our stock of pulpits is." He hurried to the rear of the store, to find Mr. Lincoln just coming in from the yard where he had taken out a box of goods to be delivered by wagon. "How are we fixed on pulpits?" asked Tom suppressing a laugh.

"Well, not very strong," replied Mr. Lincoln, "but there is an old Methodist pulpit I got in a trade when the Methodists moved into their new building."

"Is it for sale?" asked Tom.

"Certainly, it's in the shed to the north of the blacksmith shop."

"Here, Bud, you and Sam bring in that pulpit. Hurry!"

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"Can you sell it?" queried Mr. Lincoln looking at Tom as at something altogether new to his experience in life.

"Sure!"

"Then you can sell anything! A man who can sell a second-hand pulpit can—"

"Wait a moment. Haven't made the sale yet." Tom took a cloth and dusted off the pulpit before showing it to the reverend buyer. As the boys deposited the clumsy piece of furniture for his inspection, Tom remarked, "There you are, sale price five dollars."

"Dat's jes what I'se lookin' fo'!" exclaimed the gentleman of color as he surveyed the ornate piece. "Jes you load dat on mah wagon an' heah's yo' money."

As the pulpit bobbed down the road in the distance Mr. Lincoln and Tom watched it from their front door. It was a few minutes after noon and all Steubenville had gone to dinner. "It's wonderful!" said Mr. Lincoln. "Tom, you've made a wonderful start! Who'd a thought that old junk could have been sold at any price?"

"All you have to do is to let the people know what you've got and make the price right, everybody

THE FIRST SALE

buys whether they want anything or not so long as it's a bargain."

"Guess you're right according to the sale we've had this morning."

"Just wait till we have regular stock. It's about time we heard from Fort & Saxe."

"When I get dispirited again all I'll have to do'll be to remember we sold a ten-year-old fireman's helmet and a second-hand pulpit all in one morning, and at a hardware sale," said Mr. Lincoln.

CHAPTER XXIII

COMPLICATIONS

THE sale continued till late into the night, that is, until after ten o'clock, and as more business is done in Steubenville between six and ten Saturday evenings than at any other time during the week, Tom came in for a good share of the general evening trade. He had made a good start and was being wonderfully well advertised. The business continued over into the next week, in fact, the sudden spirit resultant from curiosity, advertising and cut prices cleaned out the stock so well that there was practically nothing left on which to continue business.

On Monday morning Mr. Crawford's collection of stone hatchets arrived and Tom got busy at once. Mr. Lincoln trucked the two heavy cases from the freight station to the rear of the hardware shop. Tom was delighted to receive this excellent advertising matter for his show-windows, but he was greatly disappointed in not having heard from Mr.

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Fort, for he had placed great hope for his future success in handling his new venture in the expected support from that source. Knowing how prompt Mr. Fort was in all his business dealings, he could not understand the present situation, for he had received no word though he had written twice.

The sale of the old stock had been so successful that Tom had accepted five dollars as his first week's salary. Mr. Lincoln had wanted him to take more, but Tom had determined to draw very little for his personal use from their slim resources. His one great anxiety now was to get well started on new stock and for this he had counted largely on the support and advice of Mr. Fort. When Monday came and still no word, he could stand the strain no longer. "I'll telegraph. I must know where I stand. If Mr. Fort won't back me up, then I'll have to do something else," and so he wired his old friend, referring to the previous letter.

While awaiting an answer he started in opening the cases containing the great collection of axes, hatchets, maces and stone hammers that had just arrived. "Not much use until we get in new stock," he remarked to Mr. Lincoln.

"The stock we have just been selling was so old

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they might think this exhibition of curios just a continuation of our sale," remarked Mr. Lincoln with a dry smile.

"Yep, we got to have our new stock. I asked Mr. Fort to send me what his experience would suggest we ought to have and I can't imagine why I've had no answer."

"By George!" exclaimed Mr. Lincoln, as they proceeded with opening the cases containing the exhibition, "I never guessed for a minute that there ever were or ever had been so many kinds of axes and hammers. That'll be a show that will make a hit!"

"It went all right with Fort & Saxe. I'm going round to the telegraph station. We ought to have our answer now. Next thing we do'll be to put in a telephone."

"That'll cost money."

"But it'll earn more than it'll cost. It's easy to telephone orders, you know."

"That's so, even the farmers have to have telephones these days."

"And we're going after that farming trade hot foot. I'll be back in a few minutes." Tom started for the telegraph office having some doubt as to the promptness of deliveries from that station. His

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route brought him in front of Slocum & Stilwell's store and there stood Mr. Slocum in the doorway. Tom nodded to him in passing, but Mr. Slocum stepped out to meet him.

"Good-morning, Mr. Slocum."

"Good-morning, Mr. Stewart. Well, I see you sold out a lot of Lincoln's trash."

"Yes, we cleaned up pretty well."

"You've done well. Now's the time to quit. It's one thing to sell at giving-away prices and another to sell regular stock at regular prices."

"I know what I'm doing, Mr. Slocum. We'll have clean, new, up-to-the-minute stock just as soon as we can get it in."

"Sorry for you, young man, but you'll find I was right when I said there was no place for another hardware man in this town," and the expression on Mr. Slocum's face was not pleasant to see.

"I think there's room for both of us, Mr. Slocum, and I'm going to try my best to prove there's room for The Lincoln Hardware Company."

"That company's been a joke for twenty years. You're in wrong, Mr. Stewart."

"I'm in too far, at any rate, to do anything but go ahead."

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"Remember, Slocum & Stilwell are in the field, and if you get in our way we will run you out of town. We've had this field for quite a while and don't intend to quit it."

"I don't expect you to, and I hope to have no quarrel with you. I'm sure there's a place for me here and I'm going to try and find it. I see no reason why we can't get along peacefully."

"We'll get along peacefully if you keep out of the hardware business in this town, otherwise we'll fight you to a standstill and don't you forget it."

"Sorry, Mr. Slocum, but I'm going ahead," and Tom cut short the unprofitable conversation by moving on. "Guess I'm going to have trouble from that source," he thought. A few minutes later he asked of the operator, "Any message for The Lincoln Hardware Company?"

"Yes, I been waiting for a messenger: can't get boys to 'tend to business these days; they're a lazy lot."

Tom took the message. It was a day letter and it read:

"Your letter answered, addressed by mistake to you, care of Steubenville Hardware Company, all goods shipped last week, should have arrived. Bill of lading in last letter. Wish you luck."

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Tom's spirits rose like magic. His old friend was with him, the goods were actually on their way, in fact they should have arrived. But the letters, where were they? He would go to the post office at once and find out. No, he would stop at the freight office first and see if anything had arrived.

At the freight office there was an entry of goods for The Steubenville Hardware Company, but the boy who assisted the agent could not find the goods in the shed. "There was a lot of it," he explained, "and it was all piled up here. We didn't know who to notify. It's been here two days."

"Where's the agent?" asked Tom anxiously.

"He's out in the yard. Here he comes!"

Tom explained his errand. "Why, Slocum was here and said he guessed they must be meant for him as his was the only hardware store in Steubenville. The goods are on the trucks now, big lot of heavy cases—took both trucks. Slocum said he did business with Fort & Saxe and that he'd write them, but that we could leave the stuff at his place."

"Well, the goods are for The Lincoln Hardware Company," said Tom, showing the telegram. "I ought to have that bill of lading, but the telegram explains it all right."

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"You going to buck Slocum & Stilwell?"

"Yep, going to get all the business I can."

"Wish you luck, but he's a hard one to fight. Say, that was a great sale you started."

"Did you buy anything?"

"Yes, I bought a pair of trouser-stretchers for twenty-five cents. Father bought one of those heavy inch-wide razors and mother picked up a hatful of odds and ends at the ten-cent counter."

"I hope all you people will keep on coming when I get in my new stock."

"Don't you worry about that. Slocum & Stilwell ain't so blamed popular that people go there because they want to. They go because there ain't anywhere else to go."

"Well, I'm going to try mighty hard to please this town. The goods are going to be right and the prices right, too."

"That'll get 'em and hold 'em. Now you want that freight to go to The Lincoln Hardware Company, I suppose?"

"Yes, just as soon as you can get it there."

"All right, it'll be there in an hour or less."

"Good!"

Tom sighed with relief that his new goods were at

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hand. "Now I'll go round to the post office and see if I can locate those letters," he said to himself, and a minute later he got his answer, "Delivered to Slocum & Stilwell as they are the only regular hardware store in town."

"How were they addressed?"

"Just Steubenville Hardware Company."

"Are you sure they were not addressed to me, care of the Steubenville Hardware Company?"

"Can't say, but I think not."

"Read this telegram; those letters were addressed to me, care of Steubenville Hardware Company. I want you to get them and deliver them to me."

"You better call and get them yourself. Mr. Slocum said he thought they were meant for him."

"If my name was on the envelopes you had no business to deliver those letters to Slocum. If you don't get them and deliver them to me, I'll report the matter, though I don't want to make a fuss if it isn't necessary."

"Oh, I'll get them if you think a mistake has been made!" and the postmaster, Mr. Richtman, looked shrewdly after Tom as he left the office. "Slocum's going to have trouble there," he muttered, "that youngster knows what he's about."

CHAPTER XXIV

EVERYTHING NEW

THE two truck-loads of freight headed for The Lincoln Hardware Company came down Main Street, and as they passed Slocum & Stilwell's, Mr. Slocum called out to the driver to stop. "Those goods are to be delivered here," he explained.

"No, the freight agent got instructions from Mr. Stewart, of The Lincoln Hardware Company, to deliver them there; says he ordered them."

"Who's Mr. Stewart?" exclaimed Mr. Slocum contemptuously, "he's a stranger, came to me for a job little more than a week ago. What's The Lincoln Hardware Company but a joke, and you take your orders from Mr. Stewart, hey? I'll show him he's up against the wrong man getting in my way."

"You'll have to settle that with the freight agent. I got my orders," said the driver.

"Those goods were addressed to The Steubenville

EVERYTHING NEW

Hardware Company and Slocum & Stilwell's is the only hardware store in town."

"Mr. Slocum!" The voice was that of Mr. Richtman the postmaster.

"Well, what do you want?"

"Will you let me see those two letters addressed to The Steubenville Hardware Company?"

"What do you want with them?"

"I think they were delivered to you by mistake," apologized the postmaster, "and I want to make sure they were meant for you. A claim has been made for them, and if the claimant's name was on the envelope he could make trouble for both of us."

While this conversation progressed, the driver, without awaiting its outcome, had gone on with his load and signaled the driver of the other truck to do likewise. No doubt Mr. Slocum would have made a greater effort to delay the delivery of Tom's new stock had it not been for the timely visit of Mr. Richtman. While very angry, he was still too wise to risk getting into a difficulty with the Post Office Department or to give Tom the advantage of being on the right side of what might be a public controversy.

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"I'll show you the letters; they're from Fort & Saxe, a concern I occasionally do business with, and as they were addressed to The Steubenville Hardware Company, and as we're the only hardware concern in town worthy the name, it was entirely natural for me to think the letters were intended for us."

"Quite so," agreed the postmaster, for Mr. Slocum was an important man in Steubenville and it was well for anybody holding public office to have him for a friend rather than an enemy. "Quite so, I never expected there would be another claimant for them."

The letters lay, sealed, on Mr. Slocum's desk, and were plainly addressed to "The Steubenville Hardware Company," and in the lower left-hand corner bore the name "Mr. Thomas Stewart."

"That's bad," said the postmaster. "Have you opened them?"

"Why of course not;" but there was no conviction born of those words, and though he doubted their truth, the postmaster was too much of a politician to raise any further question, but he remarked casually, "Wish you'd returned them sooner."

"Been intending to return them ever since I no-

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ticed that name down in the corner. But who cares what that Stewart upstart thinks, anyway. He can't do anything."

"Look here, Mr. Slocum, I've known you for a long time and I can speak to you as a friend. Don't you think for a minute you've got an easy mark to deal with in that Tom Stewart. He knows what he wants and I miss my guess if he doesn't get it. As to these letters, I'll see he gets them, but if I were you and happened to know the contents, I'd never let on," and with that the postmaster left. Mr. Slocum followed him with his eye, grumbling to himself, "Everybody seems to think a lot more of that kid than I do. However, rather than have trouble, I might give him a job before he gets too well started. Then I could discharge him later, if he didn't behave himself."

The letters the postmaster had just recovered from Mr. Slocum were promptly delivered to Tom, who read them eagerly. They were just as satisfactory as he had hoped they might be and Mr. Fort stood back of him like the true friend he had always shown himself. He not only offered The Lincoln Hardware Company a line of credit, but offered to come out to Steubenville and give the situation careful

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inspection, and offer suggestions born of his long experience in the hardware business. He approved of what Tom had already done and had sent out to him a pretty full line of standard hardware as well as a good assortment of novelties.

Tom felt he had a real backer in Mr. Fort and answered him promptly, accepting his offer to make a call, only requesting that he would postpone doing so until he should have had time to arrange his new stock and get his store in better order. He was angry with Mr. Slocum for having held up his mail and for his interference with the freight shipment, but decided not to make a fuss about either matter. He felt that all his energy should be given to the new business, and that the less time and thought given to petty interferences such as had been practised against him the better for the future of his new concern. He was learning to think for himself, and all the training he had had under a good master when in New York was now proving of the greatest value to him in solving his new problem and solving it alone.

The great hatchet exhibition was unpacked and ready for placing in the show-windows, and the big freight shipment of new hardware was being stacked

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up in the old blacksmith shop back of the hardware store. This shop was now to be used as a storehouse and the new stock was to be brought into the store a case at a time and carefully arranged, priced and tagged.

"We'll fix the windows first," said Tom, "the exhibit is ready and we must get it out of the way before we tackle the regular stock."

"I don't know much about this window show of yours, but I do know the people of Steubenville," said Mr. Lincoln. "They like anything that's mysterious. Suppose you just hang some sort o' curtain in front of those windows while you're fixing up the display."

"Good idea, we'll keep them guessing till the show's ready. Here, Sam, you and Bud measure off those windows. I'll order black paper muslin enough to cover them halfway up and we'll prepare our exhibit under cover."

"Say, Bud," remarked Sam as they measured off the desired lengths, "he keeps us hustlin', but he's goin' to have a sure-enough store when he gits through."

"Knows what he wants, but he's a hard one. Father never made me work this way."

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"Yep, but he never had no real store."

"Here, Sam, run round to the store and get twenty-five yards black paper muslin as wide as they have it, and you, Bud, take this order to Slocum & Stilwell's and get two gallons of spar varnish. Here's the cash. They wouldn't trust us for a cent."

"I thought you hated them 'cause Slocum don't—"

"Never mind the talk you hear; what I want is varnish and they have it, now get a move on."

"Gee! he's a hard one."

"I like the way you get action out of your helpers," remarked Mr. Lincoln. "Do you intend keeping both those boys? Have we enough to do to keep them busy?"

"Yes, and we'll need more help soon, I hope."

"You're the greatest youngster I ever met. What you going to do with that varnish you just ordered?"

"I'm going to varnish all the side-wall cases and drawer-fronts and while that's going on the wood-work is to be painted, the floor scrubbed, the windows polished, the ceiling kalsomined, the gas fixtures polished, and a telephone connection made. There'll be more things to do later, but that'll do for the present."

"You'll either break us or make us."

EVERYTHING NEW

"There's only one thing for us that I can see, and that's to go ahead. We're in this thing to win. We can't turn back, we can't do anything but go ahead."

"That reminds me of Billy Herkimer's eel."

"What was that?" asked Tom expectantly.

"Why, the drain pipe in Billy Herkimer's house got stopped up and they couldn't get water through it no matter what they did. Billy's father tried everything he knew, then Billy said he could clean out the drain pipe if his father would let him, so his father told him to go ahead. Billy went down to the swimming hole and fished for three days. He caught several small eels but, finally, he caught a great big eel and brought him home alive and started him through the drain pipe. He filled the pipe with water for the comfort of the eel.

"The eel went along all right till he came to the obstruction, then he found he couldn't go any farther, so he stood still an' thought the matter out this way. 'Can I back out?' he asked himself, but it was easy to see that he couldn't, so he said 'No.' Then he said, 'Can I turn around?' But he could see that he couldn't do that either, and he answered himself, 'No.' So then he says, 'I can't back out and I can't turn around, so I got to go ahead.' So he went ahead

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and cleaned out the drain, and I expect that's what we got to do here."

"Good for Billy Herkimer's eel!" exclaimed Tom.
"We'll go ahead, too, and clean out our drain."

CHAPTER XXV

MYSTERY

BLACK muslin covered the show-windows of The Lincoln Hardware Company's store. The front doors were closed and bore a placard reading,

THIS STORE CLOSED FOR REPAIRS AND IMPROVEMENTS, WILL OPEN APRIL 1, WITH AN ENTIRELY NEW STOCK. PRICES RIGHT.

What was going on behind that black muslin was a subject for the speculation of all Steubenville. Steubenville wanted to know. Steubenville talked about the matter throughout all its curves and corners, and Martha Acker and Alicia Norton lingered around the post office in hope of further news.

"I can't see where the money comes from to do all this fixin' up," sighed Martha.

"You don't think he run away with nothin' from York City, do you?" asked Alicia hopefully.

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"No, I don't think thet, as I seen them ask a blessin' at meals. No, it ain't rascality, but it certainly is strange for poor people to git money so sudden."

"Jethro never had nothin' and never will."

"All you can say for the Stewarts is thet they're strangers, an' they's some things about them we ain't found out yet."

"It don't seem reasonable for nobody to know nothin' in Steubenville we don't know."

"It won't last long, thanks be!"

"Here comes Hiram Johnson, mebbe he knows somethin'. He took a considerable shine to thet Stewart youngster, an' Maria, she called on Mrs. Stewart and had tea an' sody biscuits last week Thursday."

"Lo, Hi!" said Martha as the man who had distinguished himself as the first customer of the new hardware company entered the post office.

"How be ye, this mornin'?"

"Right smart, Miss Acker."

"Thought ye had the misery in the small o' your back. You was complainin' some last week."

"It was these here microbes you read about that was a-gettin' me last week, but I got 'em beat now,

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by Heck! When I'm a-smokin' my old corncob, got a nutmeg tied round my neck, an' a few moth-balls in my pockets, I ain't afraid of any old microbe that ever flew."

"Oh, you, Hiram Johnson!" exclaimed Alicia. "Ain't you the worst?"

"Now, Hi," insinuatingly suggested Martha Acker, "what is thet new friend o' yourn, Tom Stewart, doin'? Ain't he the greatest?"

"He's a smart un all right, an' straight, too. Maria saw his folks an' they ain't nothin' to complain of there neither."

"Yes, Hi, I grants all thet, but where's all this money comin' from thet he's spendin' so lavish on Jethro's old hardware store thet never did amount to shucks?"

"I don't rightly know, but mebbe he saved his money to make this here start in Steubenville."

"Mebbe nothin'!" indignantly exclaimed Alicia. "Boys don't never save nothin' let alone savin' enough at his age to stock a store!"

"He's a onusual young man, as I maintained from the minute he sold me thet 'ere helmet, an' Maria says so an' she seen his family."

"You knowin' him so well, an' bein' so friendly,

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why don't you go over there now an' see what's goin' on behind them black curtains," suggested Martha.

"Yes, an' see what Jethro an' the new man are doin' so mysterious," added Alicia.

"Jethro ain't doin' much o' it, I reckon," said Hiram.

"No, he ain't the man he was," sighed Martha.

"No, he sure ain't," agreed Alicia mournfully.

"It says on the door the place ain't goin' to open till April 1," said Hiram, "but I reckon there ain't no sign on the rear door, so I might as well go around by the alley an' see what's goin' on; but mind, I ain't goin' to tell you ladies what I see, 'cause you might fergit yerselves an' tell it to someone else an' let it leak out all over town."

"Never!" exclaimed Martha.

"They'll never git a word from me!" snapped Alicia. "I'm not the kind that talks free about other people's business."

"Wall, I'll be very careful what I find out," said Hiram with a smile as he left his lady companions in the post office and stepped out to where his horses stood hitched to his farm-wagon at the curb. A few moments later he appeared at the rear entrance of the Lincoln store. This was closed, but there was

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the noise of hammers in the old blacksmith shop to the rear, so he stepped over, to find several very busy people. They were so busy, in fact, that they did not notice the newcomer for several moments as he stood contemplating their activity. Suddenly one of the workers raised his head. "Lo, Hi!"

"Lo, Jethro, you look busy!"

"Can't always go by appearances."

"Then it's a danged good imitation. What you doing, anyhow, so blamed mysterious behind your black window curtains?"

"Advertising," answered Jethro laconically.

"It ain't my idea o' advertisin' to keep things secret."

"Yep, that's right enough, but it's our idea of advertising to make people talk."

"An' right you are there, for they're certainly talkin' fast enough."

"What they saying, Hi?"

"Oh, most everythin', all the way from nothin' to somethin', and then some! Things that worries 'em most is whar ye got the money from to do all yer layin' out."

"Think we stole it?"

"Some does. They says neither o' you never had

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nothin', and twice nothin' don't make somethin', so whar did you git it from?"

"Never mind where we got it, and the more they talk the more free advertising The Lincoln Hardware Company gets."

"What ye got behind that black curtain in the windows, Jethro?"

"Just a little show, a sort of free exhibit for Steubenville."

"Show it to me?"

"Sure you won't tell?"

"Never a soul."

"All right, come along and I'll show you. It's going to be advertised in the *Eagle* tonight." And Jethro led Hiram Johnson into the store. There he found Bud busy varnishing the cases and a kalso-miner at work on the ceiling. Sam was burnishing the gas fixtures. The floor had been scrubbed and was being rubbed down preparatory to receiving a filler, which was to be followed with floor varnish. A painter was busily at work, a carpenter was engaged on shelves, bins and racks, and Tom, with sleeves rolled up, advanced to meet them from where he had been at work on the window display. "Glad to see you, Mr. Johnson. You were our first cus-

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tomers and now you're the first to get a look at what we're doing. How's the fireman's helmet?"

"Oh, all right! I ain't got no special use for it, jest wanted it, thet's all. Say, you mind showin' me thet window show o' yourn?"

"No, come along and look it over, it's mostly hatchets of one kind and another."

"There's hatchets and axes an' thet's about all, so far as I know."

"Well then look at this," and Tom showed him the exhibit that had proved such a success in Fort & Saxe's show-windows in New York. There were the same old stone hammers, stone tomahawks, stone wedges, chisels and other primitive stone implements, and then followed a series of ancient hammers and axes of copper, iron and bronze till steel appeared, and the wonderful Damascus blades came into existence.

The scimitar, mace and battle-ax, in some cases highly ornamented with inlaid gold and silver, followed in regular order until the Anglo-Saxon ax appeared, reaching its final development in the double-edged ax used by the lumbermen in our own northern forests.

Hiram noted it all with eager and appreciative

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eyes. "Greatest exhibition I ever see!" he remarked. "Say, do you know I can swing an ax considerable myself? You ought to see me split rails."

Tom looked at him keenly a minute. "What's your height?" he asked.

"'Bout six feet four."

"Mr. Johnson, you look something like Abraham Lincoln and you have the height."

"Been told that before. Wish I was like him some other way than looks."

"There can't be two Abraham Lincolns," said Tom, "but you could stand in our window after this show is over and swing an ax. We'd fix you up to look like a picture of Lincoln. There isn't another man in the country that could take the part as well as you."

"I wouldn't mind doin' it if I could really show 'em how I can swing an ax."

"Great!" exclaimed Tom with sudden inspiration, "We'll have a chopping contest!"

CHAPTER XXVI

SATURDAY TRADE

THERE were two announcements in the *Steubenville Eagle* before the final opening day, each telling of the grand event to come. This advertising may not have been necessary, for there was hardly a person of discerning age in the town who did not know all about what was going on behind those black curtains. However, the advertising had its effect, for it was also something unusual, and the whole affair was most extraordinary. People turned and looked after Tom as he passed, and many remarked, with thumb over shoulder, "That's him."

The actual opening took place on a Saturday, a day chosen because of its importance as the main day of commerce of the week, and because the last evening of the week brought in the country people in large numbers. It was the right day to start a business sensation in Steubenville.

On Saturday morning the black curtains came

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down exposing the great exhibition, and from the moment this took place there was an appreciative audience before the show-windows.

The inside of the store fairly glistened in new varnish, bright paint, and shining fixtures. The polished glass cases covered a carefully arranged assortment of cutlery and attractive novelties. Every drawer in every case along the wall bore its proper number and sample, the nail bins were full and numbered, farming implements ranged part way down the center of the room in their racks. Everywhere the visitors looked they found cleanliness and order.

There were no job lots on this occasion, only new standard stock and novelties. Among the first came Hiram and Martha Johnson. They had shown a personal interest in the success of the new enterprise, and were taking every occasion to speak a good word for the business and its proprietors. "Ain't it wonderful, Maria, what this Tom Stewart has done here in a few weeks? It did look like there wasn't enough life in this old shop to furnish circulation for a mosquito. Now look at it!"

"I'm 'feared they ain't going to be no marked-down goods here," sighed Maria. "I hate to pay askin'-price for anythin'."

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Tom had turned from waiting on a customer to greet his old friends and heard the last remark. "Now, don't let that worry you, Mrs. Johnson, the asking-price is going to be so low that you can get new things at prices as good as job-lot prices. Just look around and see for yourself."

"I'm mighty relieved to hear thet. I allus said, why couldn't they sell at the job price to start with instead of waitin' three or four years?"

"You're right, too. I don't intend to have any three- or four-year-old stock."

"How can you help it?" asked Hiram.

"Sell," said Tom.

"Suppose nobody wants it."

"There's always somebody wants it. All you've got to do is to let everybody know you have it and then make the price right."

"Guess you know what you're doin'," said Hiram, showing a sort of personal pride in Tom and his shop.

Tom and Mr. Lincoln and the boys were busy that Saturday. The store was crowded from morning till closing time, and while the sales were satisfactory, by far the larger portion of the visitors were sight-seers. Tom listened to all that was said and made

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mental notes for future use. Mr. Lincoln, who knew everybody, was in his glory. Mary again served as cashier and enjoyed it greatly. It being Saturday, Guy had no school to attend and so offered his services as errand-boy. His offer was immediately accepted and he put in the hardest day's work of his life. "You're all right as a brother," he grunted during the evening rush hours, "but I wouldn't like to work for you right along, you drive too hard."

"You're a dandy errand-boy," said Tom with a laugh, "if I could be so successful as an errand-boy, I'd never think of being a policeman or a fireman. All the customers like you."

"Ah—h!" growled Guy, who, in spite of his complaining, had done splendid and willing service. "Here comes your jay friend," he remarked, as Hiram Johnson approached.

"Wouldn't your mother like to be here on this great occasion?" he asked Tom rather shyly.

"She certainly would. I should have arranged for that," said Tom, somewhat abashed that a comparative stranger should have made the suggestion.

"My team's standin' outside, mebbe you wouldn't mind me and Maria goin' to fetch her."

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"Thank you, that'll be great! I'm so glad you thought of that."

Hiram Johnson started at once to find Maria and get his team ready. Tom turned sharply to Guy, who had heard this bit of conversation. "What did you call him?" he asked.

"I called him your jay friend, but I take it back; he's all right, if he does wear chin whiskers and look like Abraham Lincoln."

They were standing near the cashier's desk and Mary overheard what was being said, so, after making change for a man who had just purchased a Star Junior hand cultivator, she turned on Guy. "Just because a man doesn't dress to suit you or cut his hair to suit you, he's a jay. Who are you to call people names, and Mr. Johnson the only one to suggest bringing mother here, and we all know how happy it'll make her. Mr. Johnson is a real gentleman!"

"But he has an Angora beard, and he is a jay—say a gentleman jay."

"You run along and do your errands."

"You forget where you are, you're not at home. Home's a place where men do what women want done, but a store is a place where women do what men want done."

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"That'll be all from you. You're no man."

"Ah—h!" retorted Guy as he went out on another delivery.

He had gone but a few minutes when Hiram and Maria arrived, bringing Mrs. Stewart between them. She was evidently improving in health, or her apparent improvement may have been due to the excitement of the new surroundings and her joy in her son's work and her enthusiasm and confidence in anything he undertook. "Oh, Tom," she whispered, so that no customer might hear, "I'm so proud of you! I know you'll succeed."

"How can I help it, Mother, with such a backer as you."

It was the right thing to say and it was absolutely true. As Tom was very much employed, Hiram and Maria took Mrs. Stewart from one point of interest to another; but Hiram invariably brought his charge back to the show-window where he could expatiate on the marked advantages of the American ax over that made by any other nation. "We're exportin' them to the uttermost parts o' the earth now, and I can handle one myself to some extent," he remarked, with a show of pride.

"Tom tells me you're going to help him with a

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chopping contest," suggested Mrs. Stewart, smiling.

"Yep, an' it'll be a big show, an' thet ain't no mistake!"

"Come, Hi, don't you get too high an' mighty, there'll be somebody can cut through ahead o' you some day! I allus said 'pride goeth before a fall an' many there be that gits took up short for talkin' big.' You're crazy about axes, why don't you carry one with you same as dudes carries canes."

"Yes, Hi," remarked Mr. Lincoln, who had just joined the group. "Why don't you carry an ax?"

"Well," said Hiram slowly, "you remember that old grandfather's clock o' ours? She stood about eight foot by two wide an' a foot an' a half deep. Well, sir, I once brought it to town to have the case repaired, an' I took it from the wagon on my shoulder an' started round the corner to Heinrich's cabinet shop, an' I'll be ding-donged if the tail end o' it didn't slap one o' these here city salesmen stayin' at the American House, right spang in the face, him comin' round the corner the other way. What you think he said? He said!—ha, ha! he said: 'Why don't you carry a watch?' No, I ain't goin' to carry no ax, somebody might ask me why I didn't carry a penknife."

CHAPTER XXVII

AN OFFER

THERE was one direct effect of the Saturday opening of The Lincoln Hardware Company that was a surprise to Tom. It came in the shape of a call early Monday morning from Mr. Slocum. This gentleman was in a genial frame of mind and his one desire seemed to be to congratulate Tom on the excellent start he had made. "I just dropped in to look around and see what you've done to make so much talk," he said with a smile.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Slocum," Tom replied, trying to forget former hostile acts.

"You've made great changes in this old shop in a mighty short time."

"Well, Mr. Lincoln and the rest of us just piled in and something had to happen."

"Oh, I know it's all your work! You deserve the credit."

"That's kind of you. I'm very glad you feel that

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way about this, though we're competitors there's no reason we shouldn't be friendly."

"None at all, Mr. Stewart, but why should we be competitors? Don't you think we could get together?"

"Why, I hadn't thought of such a thing."

"Now, listen to me, Mr. Stewart, you've made a start here in an old run-down store and I'll admit you've done wonders, but the novelty will soon wear off and there'll be nothing left. Trade'll leave you as quick as it came. My advice to you is to stand from under before it's too late. Get out and come with me."

"I don't quite understand you," fairly gasped Tom.

"It's plain enough. I'll give you a job and good wages, better than you'll ever earn here."

"And leave Mr. Lincoln?"

"Yes. Who's Mr. Lincoln but a ne'er-do-well; better tie up to somebody who knows how to succeed."

"I think you've made a mistake, Mr. Slocum."

"It's your last chance, Mr. Stewart. I offer you a job, good wages and my friendship."

"Why didn't you do it sooner?"

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"Never mind about that now, better late than never. Better leave Lincoln before he drags you down the way he does everything he touches."

"Mr. Lincoln is my partner and I'm proud to call him friend, and we're working to make a success of this little business, and we're going to do it, too. No, Mr. Slocum, the time for accepting your offer has gone by."

"Maybe it's because you've tied up your money here. I could arrange for getting that back," insisted Mr. Slocum.

"Yes, my money's here and my heart's here, too, so let's drop the matter."

"So you prefer that—that down-at-the-heel Lincoln to me?" retorted Mr. Slocum losing his temper.

"Yes, sir." Tom was trying hard to control his temper.

"Then take the consequences," and Mr. Slocum stalked out of the store in quite dramatic fashion.

"Nobody loves me," said Tom with a grin, as the door closed with a bang. Turning he found himself face to face with Mr. Lincoln.

"Tom," and the older man cleared his throat. "Tom, I was just in back here and couldn't help hearing. Tom Stewart, maybe you better go."

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"Why?"

"Because what he says is true. I am a ne'er-do-well and Oh, Lord, maybe I might drag you down!"

"Don't you like my work?"

"Tom, you're a son to me, you're the only man that ever made me think I might succeed after all. I've been an habitual failure, Tom, till you came and gave me new courage. But that's why I can't allow myself to be the cause of your failing."

"You don't like my work?" insisted Tom, as though he had not heard what Mr. Lincoln was saying.

"I heard what you said to Mr. Slocum and, boy, I love you for it, but I can't stand in the way of your making good."

"You don't like my work?" demanded Tom.

"Yes! yes! yes! but—"

"All right, then, let's go on and show Slocum who's who in Steubenville."

"Thank God for you, Tom! Now I know we shall succeed."

"Good! I'm willing. Let's open the door and let in a little fresh air," and as he suited action to words Mr. Lincoln followed him with his eye, while his hands fumbled with a well-worn copy of Virgil.

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As Tom threw open the door in his effort to avoid further thanks from Mr. Lincoln, he was met by Hiram Johnson, who was evidently just coming in and very full of an important mission. "Lo, Tom, just the man I'm lookin' for, want to see Jethro, too!"

"Well, he's here, we're all here. Now, what do you want?"

"I want to talk over that wood-choppin' bee."

"Lo, Hi!" said Mr. Lincoln, stepping forward, "what's your hurry? Guess you must want to win a prize, hey?"

"Surest thing you know, and I want to git started. I can swing a ax better'n any o' these here Steubenville dudes. I'll show 'em!"

"What's your great plan? Tell us what you've laid out for us to do," and Mr. Lincoln seated himself on the recently varnished counter.

"Each man what's goin' to compete brings his own ax an' a log o' wood two foot through, an' the feller who cuts through first gits through soonest and gits the prize."

"Who furnishes the prize?"

"The Lincoln Hardware Company."

"What do we get out of it?"

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"Oh, you, you git advertisin'!"

"That's all very well, but we got to get more than advertising. We got to get business out of it," said Mr. Lincoln. "So I make it one of the rules that each man must have one of our Washington Standard axes."

"That means I got to buy a ax?"

"Yep, and it means every other contestant has to buy one."

"Well, I hate to spend money for a ax when I 'low to have the best one in the State now," complained Hiram.

"But if you win you get the ax free of charge," announced Tom.

"That's another song, an' I enters this contest right now," said the confident Hiram.

"Then there's something else wrong with your plan," said Mr. Lincoln. "One man might bring maple, another oak, and some smart one would bring a two-foot poplar log so soft you could cut through it with a lead cheese knife."

"Thet's so," said Hiram. "We got to stop any such funny business as thet. How you goin' to fix it?"

"There are a number of good-sized maples down

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in the swamp, at the lower end of my farm, that ought to come out to give the smaller ones a chance. I'll take regular sawmill rates for them if you and your chopping friends will pay."

"The sawmill will pay standin' price for the trees, an' I'll see to it they gits felled an' delivered," eagerly promised Hiram.

"Delivered where?" queried Jethro.

"Why—er, that's so. Where we goin' to have this great contest, anyway?"

"Ball grounds," suggested Tom.

"Good! I'll see the timber is delivered at the ball grounds. The sawmill will pay you for the trees. Every man will buy a Washington Standard ax and every man will have a log to chop."

"Good! Who'll judge the contest?" asked Jethro.

"The man who offers the prize, and that's Mr. Lincoln," said Tom.

"No, it had ought to be the Mayor," insisted Hiram.

"Better advertising, Tom. We'll get the Mayor in it and the Common Council, unless they want to chop."

"Bet I win first prize," said Hiram.

"Hope you do. Remember you got to stand in

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our window made up as Abraham Lincoln splitting rails before we start for the ball grounds," said Tom.

"I'll do it, but I rather forgit about that part o' the program," sighed Hiram.

CHAPTER XXVIII

RUMOR

THEY'S two things I can't make out," complained Alicia, as she kept her daily appointment with Martha Acker at the post office.

"Do tell," answered the ever-listening Martha.

"One is, what all this fuss about a wood-chopping contest means, and the other is Slocum's advertisement in next Friday's *Eagle*."

"But I ain't seen next Friday's *Eagle*, nor yet you nor nobody else, today bein' Wednesday," exclaimed Martha, indignant that her friend had secured exclusive advance information.

"Oh, well, if folks will tell me things it ain't my fault!"

"Anything special in what Slocum says in his advertisement come Friday?"

"Well, I should say!"

"Do tell."

"I hadn't ought to. It was told to me private."

RUMOR

"Oh, you know me, Alicia! I ain't never the one to pass on anythin' what's told to me private."

"Might as well tell you, anyway, 'cause if I wait till Friday then everybody'll know, an' 'twon't be no secret to tell nobody."

"Yes, that's my way o' lookin' at what news I hears, too. I says, it ain't no use waitin' till everybody knows what I knows before I tells it."

"Ain't nobody goin' to listen to what the whole town's got. Now I got it, by bein' on hand at the right time thet Slocum & Stilwell is goin' for The Lincoln Hardware Company hard. They're advertisin' everythin' they got at prices thet they think'll kill thet Tom Stewart."

"Lawdy! Let me go this minit. I know somebody—"

"Now, Martha, be careful where you say you got the news," warned Alicia.

"Trust me, Alicia! My! but ain't I in a hurry! But, Alicia, thet there Tom Stewart ain't no fool. He's eddicated, an' smart besides."

Alicia stood looking after her friend. "I promised not to tell any of The Lincoln Hardware people what I found out, but I do reckon the news is goin' to leak out their way," she said to herself.

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It was scarcely five minutes later that Martha Acker happened in at The Lincoln Hardware Company's door. "Afternoon, Mr. Stewart."

"How are you, Miss Acker?"

"I'm tolerable, an' I ain't here to buy nothin' neither."

"I'm sorry to hear that. Now why not buy something? Our goods are the best and our prices are right," said Tom playfully.

"There's where you're wrong. The goods may be what you say, but the prices is high."

"But our prices are as low as anybody's."

"They ain't as low as anybody's next week."

"But next week isn't here yet, and I don't know what other people's prices will be then, so I won't begin to worry yet," and Tom smiled though a little puzzled.

"But did you see Friday's paper?"

"Yes, but that doesn't give next week's prices. That was last week."

"No, no! One of us must be as thick as mud! Did you see this week's paper?"

"Of course not, it isn't published yet."

"Sure! You're right, I forgot. Now I'll begin at the beginnin'. There was a adver-tise-ment in next

RUMOR

Friday's *Eagle* by Slocum where he puts all his prices so low you can't sell no more hardware."

"Where did you get that?" And Tom was serious enough now.

"Never mind where I got it. It come straight enough, an' he said when he got through with you he'd leave you on both sides o' the street."

"Going to be a little rough with me, hey?"

"Well, I'm a-tellin' you all I know. I thought mebbe you'd like to know in time."

"Thank you, Martha, you're a true friend. I'll know what to do."

"I thought you would, an' thet's why I come so quick."

Tom turned thoughtfully into the store. He could see the coming conflict clearly enough. "Going to cut the life out of me, going to leave me on both sides of the street. Sorry I've got to fight him; it isn't necessary; there's room for both, but if I must fight, I'll fight hard. Cut prices in next *Eagle*? Guess I'll call on the editor."

The great hatchet exhibit had held the interest of the people for a month before the decision to remove it was made, and the next exhibit was right in line. One window was cleared before the other in

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order to stage the last of the "ax" window displays.

An announcement of the new display in The Lincoln Hardware Company's window appeared conspicuously in the *Friday Eagle*. Also there was a column on the coming log-chopping competition, with appropriate references to the progressive spirit shown by The Lincoln Hardware Company.

There was also another advertisement in the *Eagle* by a concern which had not heretofore used its columns. It consisted of a half page devoted entirely to itemized lists showing former prices and the present cut rates at which hardware could be purchased of Slocum & Stilwell. It was really heart-breaking to Tom, for he could see at a glance that he could not meet the new prices and leave even a slight margin of profit. In fact, some of the figures were less than his cost. He took some satisfaction from the appearance of his own advertisement on the half page opposite, which read:

STANDARD GOODS AT FAIR PRICES, NO CUT IN QUALITY AND NO CUT IN PRICE. GO TO THE LINCOLN HARDWARE COMPANY'S STORE IF YOU WANT HARDWARE. IF YOU'RE HANDY WITH AN AX, ENTER OUR LOG-CHOPPING CONTEST WEDNESDAY NEXT.

"My ad looks all right, but it's prices that count. Anyway, we've sold fifty-three of our Washington

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Standard axes. Guess we'll have a contest all right." Tom was taking what comfort he could out of the situation, but by the following Wednesday morning, the day set for the contest, he had come to a full realization of how hard was the situation Slocum & Stilwell had made for him. He also felt confident that his log-chopping contest was to be well attended.

The baseball field was the chosen spot for the great ax-swinging event, and early Wednesday morning the maple logs from Mr. Lincoln's wood-patch were ranged in two parallel lines, about twenty feet apart, down the center of the field. The logs were blazed and numbered, and every contestant had been assigned his corresponding number. Four men were to be started at a time. On the word "Go," the chips would begin to fly. A man would be stationed with a peavy to turn the log on request of the chopper, and time would be taken with a stop-watch. The winner in this contest would be entitled to take part in the semi-finals and, if successful there, would have a chance to compete in the finals. The prize was a silver cup engraved with a shield on one side and a pair of crossed axes on the other. The winner would have his name inscribed on the shield, but would have to hold it against all comers at the next annual con-

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test before it became his absolute property. If he failed to do so, the next champion chopper would hold it on the same terms.

On Wednesday afternoon, there was collected about The Lincoln Hardware Company's store a large and good-natured crowd. In the right-hand show-window stood a man in appearance very much like the familiar engravings of Abraham Lincoln. He stooped slightly and in his hands was an old frontiersman's ax taken from the recent exhibit, and at his feet lay several newly split rails, such as are seen along many a country road.

The show caught the fancy of the crowd, and they had much to say both in approval and rough humor. The man in the window posed as long as he could stand it and then laid down his exhibition ax, and presently appeared among his neighbors in front of the store.

"Hello, Abe!" came from an onlooker. "How did you get all fussed up in them togs?"

"'Tain't my fault. My mother made me dress this way," replied Hiram, as, with a Washington Standard ax over his shoulder, he led the procession toward the ball field.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE CONTEST

MAYOR GOODMAN opened the contest with a few words to the townspeople. He said: "These public gatherings are a good thing for a progressive town such as Steubenville, and I'm glad to see so many of our citizens interested in the manly art of chopping wood. The enterprise shown by The Lincoln Hardware Company is an example that other of our best business men may follow to their own advantage and to the betterment of our town."

The short speech was heartily cheered, and the first four men eagerly took their places opposite their logs.

The ball field swarmed with men, women and children. Everybody knew everybody else and there were no strangers. Even the hill people were well known.

"Did you ever see the like?" asked Martha Acker, under her breath, of her friend and fellow news-carrier, Alicia. "Here's the old Lincoln Hardware

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Company that everybody thought dead an' buried, up an' comin', an' people talkin' about it as though it was somethin' new."

"There's been more to talk about in Steubenville account o' thet store these last few weeks than there's been in a year. I can't figure it out. Where did the money come from an' who on earth is this Tom Stewart?"

"I don't know no more about thet than nobody, but I suspect wherever he got it he come by it honest. Mrs. Stewart ain't the kind to have brought up no crooks."

"Yes, but it is queer; Jethro never had nothin', so he ain't helpin', and what's worse, all this fuss ain't goin' to do them no good."

"I'd like to know why not."

"You see what Slocum & Stilwell done in the *Eagle*. They're goin' to sell so low that nobody else can't sell nothin'."

"But nobody else likes Slocum & Stilwell and never did."

"Now, Martha, jest you ask yourself if you wants a pair o' scissors, an' Lincoln has 'em for twenty-five cents an' you can get them at Slocum's for twenty-two cents, tell me where are you goin' to buy?"

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"I'd go to Lincoln's."

"No, you'd go shoppin' an' buy where the price was right."

"I think I'd buy at Lincoln's."

"I know you'd buy at Slocum's."

"Jest to show you, I'll buy a pair o' scissors at Lincoln's soon as this choppin' bee is over. There they go! Gracious! See the chips fly!"

"If I was goin' to git married—an' I might a' been several times so far as opportunities go—I'd pick one o' them men an' be sure o' wood enough to keep the fire goin', if nothin' else."

"Them fellers'll chop for a prize, but them kind ain't no good at choppin' kindlin'. Give me some little runt thet ain't stuck on himself for a all-round useful husbin'."

"Look, Martha!" whispered Alicia anxiously, "there's a man talkin' to Tom Stewart I ain't seen before."

"Who can he be, I wonder? Accordin' to my notion, it's one o' his friends from Noo York, he don't look to be from these parts."

"Let's get a little nearer, we may hear something. I always did want to know where he got his money from for all this business."

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So the true news center of Steubenville moved closer to its object.

The contest was now well under way. At Mr. Lincoln's "Go," the chips had begun to fly, and eager assistants stood with peavies clutching the logs ready to turn at the signal. "Turn! Turn!" came from the choppers as each reached the center of his log, and over went the timbers, presenting a new surface to the contestants. It was an inspiring sight as the lean and eager ax-swingers cut through the hard wood in front of them. "Southope first!" called the Mayor, and while the other three of the group were but a few seconds behind, they were eliminated from the contest. There were fifteen of these preliminary contests, eliminating all but fifteen men for the next round. These also took their places and proceeded in the same way, till there were but four men left for the great final contest. Needless to say, Hiram Johnson was one of these.

Tom had been eagerly explaining the situation to the stranger at his side, and it was evident from tone and gesture that he was talking to an old friend whom he very much wished to please.

Alicia had worked her way through the crowd till she stood quite close to the object of her news-gath-

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ering instinct. She heard Tom say, "Now, Mr. Fort, I wish you would stand with Mayor Goodman and judge this final round. It's bound to be close, and there'll be less question as to favoritism if you, who are a total stranger, will help on the decision."

"Oh, all right, Tom, if you think it will help any! It's all splendid advertising, and I congratulate you on thinking it out."

"It's not my idea, I borrowed it same as always."

"It's just as good; ideas have to come from somewhere."

"Notice they're all using the Washington Standard ax purchased at our store?"

"I noticed that. One of the regulations, I suppose?" and Mr. Fort smiled as a teacher might on an apt scholar.

"Yep, now let me introduce you to Mayor Goodman."

There was the usual exchange of courtesies, and then the Mayor introduced Mr. Fort to the gathering as Tom's former employer and friend, and as a leader of industry in the hardware line. He also informed them that he would make the final decision and present the first prize, the silver cup, to the win-

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ner, and an ax to each participant in the final round of the contest.

Mr. Fort thanked the Mayor, and captured the crowd with a few well-directed pleasantries. Then the final round commenced. Chips flew in showers and Hiram, though competing against younger men, was holding his own splendidly. "Turn!" he yelled, and his assistant gave his log a twist bringing up the other side. The other choppers were right with him, but, old woodsman that he was, his greater skill brought him through his log a couple of strokes ahead of the next man.

"Hiram Johnson!" announced Mr. Fort, who had watched the game as closely as a professional timer. "Hiram first, Lewis second, Tompkins and Jaeger tie for third place—all close, and the finest exhibition of ax work I ever saw. I hope I'll be invited to come for the next contest. This time my coming was an accident, but I like your town and admire men who can handle an ax the way you've shown me today. I never saw such close work; there were only seconds between you. The winner will have to look to his laurels. Any one of a dozen here may take the prize away from him next year.

"Mr. Hiram Johnson, this cup is awarded you as

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champion wood-chopper of Steubenville, and it will have your name engraved on the shield. If you can hold it against next year's competitors it becomes your property. Now, Hiram, look out!

"Messrs. Lewis, Tompkins and Jaeger, all within a few seconds of winning first prize, here's a good ax for each of you to practice with. Get busy for next year!

"Now I want to say a word or two about the man behind this enterprise and whom I came here to visit.

"I want to tell the citizens of Steubenville that in taking Mr. Tom Stewart from me, you have secured one of the most promising young men I ever had in my employ, and he thoroughly understands his business."

As Mr. Fort finished, Alicia whispered to Martha, "There! that explains it, there's where the money comes from. Slocum ain't goin' to have it all his own way."

"I should hope not," said Martha, "an' I'm going to buy my scissors at Lincoln's irregardless."

Hiram Johnson was shaking hands and receiving the congratulations of the defeated contestants who, on the whole, were well pleased that the prize should have gone to an acknowledged ax champion rather than to one of the other competitors.

MAKING GOOD IN THE VILLAGE

As the crowd scattered, Tom got a few minutes with Mr. Fort. "I was certainly surprised to look round and see you watching our contest."

"You ought not to be," said Mr. Fort with a smile. "You advertised it."

"But not in the New York papers."

"Yes, but I've been a subscriber to the *Steubenville Eagle* ever since you started in business, and I wanted to see this contest you've been advertising for the last two weeks, and I'll say right here that I've been well repaid for my visit. It's good business, Tom, very good business."

"I feel that I've made a good start," replied Tom, "but I'm a sort of curiosity and the novelty will soon wear off, and then I can't tell what will happen to me. I've spent all I had saved up and owe a lot besides, mostly to you."

"Never mind that, you've invested your money and invested it well. I'll wait till it comes back to you in trade, and then you can pay me as you go along."

"But where do you come in?"

"Why, don't you see, I have a new and very promising customer."

"Glad you look at it in that light. There is one

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serious side to my present situation and I can't tell you how serious it is going to be."

"What is it?"

"Slocum & Stilwell have cut their prices to figures below my cost."

"We'll look into that. They can't buy at lower figures than you, and if they sell at less than cost, they can't keep it up very long."

"They might keep it up long enough to put me out of business."

"No, they can't." And there was a ring in Mr. Fort's voice that put new courage into Tom. "Don't you change a price yet on their account, and don't you sell anything but standard goods, either. I'm going to take a copy of the *Eagle* and study over that list of Slocum's cut prices. You'll hear from me. Don't worry, you've made a splendid start. There's only one thing that I advise your doing at once, and that is to incorporate. The cost is slight compared with the advantages derived. I don't like partnerships. I like what I have seen of Mr. Lincoln, but incorporate just the same."

Mr. Fort departed on the evening train, but his visit left Tom feeling the support of a strong man behind him.

CHAPTER XXX

A WAY OUT

THE novelty of the rummage sale had brought its natural result in clearing out the old stock at greatly reduced prices. Renovating the old store, the new stock, and the advertising that went with it had also brought satisfactory results, and the wood-chopping contest had prolonged the general interest in the new enterprise. It was something new, and Steubenville had enjoyed and responded to the novelty the coming of Tom Stewart had furnished. Now, however, the enterprise was becoming an old story and would have to stand or fall on its merits.

The days following the wood-chopping contest were dull days. Slocum & Stilwell had made so strong a bid for trade through their cut in prices, that The Lincoln Hardware store was a very quiet place so far as business was concerned.

Tom had shipped back the great stone-ax exhibit and had a sporting-goods display in one window and

A WAY OUT

an aluminum-cooking-utensil display in the other. His store had a snappy, up-to-date appearance, and on special trade-marked and standard stock, the prices on which had not been materially cut by Slocum & Stilwell, he was having a limited amount of business. But, after the fine start he had made, the quietness and emptiness of his store was oppressive. When the second week passed and almost the third without the least improvement, in spite of advertising and changes in window display, Tom began to really feel the load and strain of his new enterprise. So long as he was busy doing something he could stand the hardest conditions bravely, but waiting, waiting, waiting, and not being sure what to do next he found to be beyond endurance. He became restless and worried, and the fact that he kept his troubles away from his folks at home did not help him. "We've got to do something," he said to Mr. Lincoln toward the end of the third week of waiting. "I can't stand this any longer. Slocum's getting all the trade."

"Now, Tom, be patient, I'm not the business man you are, but I do know this, our stock is all high grade and we can stand back of it, and our prices are fair. That ought to mean business in the long run."

MAKING GOOD IN THE VILLAGE

"Yes, but if Slocum offers the same goods at less money, what chance do we have to sell?"

"But he's not offering the same goods at less money. What he's cutting prices on is mighty cheap stuff and it'll spoil him if he sells enough of it."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Certainly. Martha Acker bought a cheap pair of scissors there; they might as well have been made out of lead. She complained to me about it. She said she thought she was saving money when she got them. She took them back, but the only answer she got was that they didn't guarantee the cut-price stock. All they got to do is to sell enough of it."

Tom took what consolation he could get from this conversation, but the fact remained that very little trade was coming to The Lincoln Hardware Company's store. When two more weeks went by without change Tom became desperate. He thought of writing to Mr. Fort and asking his advice, and this would have been a wise thing to have done, but he had become quite self-confident and thought it was his place to handle the situation himself. It was during one of his fits of depression that the representative of Snare & Tobey, wholesale hardware job-

A WAY OUT

bers, called. Tom was in the front of the store when the well-dressed stranger entered. He was a man of indefinite middle age, very well groomed and rather overdressed, with too great a sprinkling of jewelry and badges of secret societies.

"This Mr. Stewart?" asked the stranger, and at Tom's nod he continued, "I'm Bagby, Bagby of Snare & Tobey. Guess you know us by reputation, everybody in the hardware line knows Snare & Tobey."

"Yes, I've heard of your house, Mr. Bagby, but I'm more interested right now in trying to sell what I've got than in buying new stock."

"Of course you know your own business better than I do, but isn't it possible that you haven't got the right line?"

"Look around," said Tom with some show of pride. "Guess if you know hardware, you'll recognize the trade-marks."

"All high-priced goods. I sized up the place the minute I got inside the door. Splendid stock, standard lines and all that, but too good for the customers. What they want is price, price, price!"

"Shouldn't wonder but that you're right," answered Tom listlessly.

MAKING GOOD IN THE VILLAGE

"Now, see here, Mr. Stewart, I didn't call on you today for the fun of it. I want to talk business."

"Might as well save your time and mine, for I'm not buying," replied Tom a little impatiently.

"It may interest you to know that I'm selling Slocum & Stilwell the line that enables them to cut prices 'way down and still make good money on every sale."

"You sell Slocum & Stilwell?"

"Sure, and it's our cheap line that brings the business to his store; the price catches 'em. Once in the store, he sells 'em our goods and high-priced stock, too, but our cheap line is the bait that catches 'em."

"But Slocum & Stilwell advertise a cut in all prices on their regular stock."

"Oh, that's only advertising! What they really sell at the cut prices is our cheap line, and it's pretty good for the money, too. Here, look over our list, everything in cutlery, razors, knives, scissors, carpenters' tools, plumbers' tools, auto-repair tools, kitchen utensils and novelties, from watches to fountain pens, some big pieces, too—a full line of farmers' tools—can you beat it? Look at the prices."

"Are you sure this is what Slocum & Stilwell are selling?"

"Don't take my word for it, you don't have to,"

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and to Tom's surprise Mr. Bagby spread before Tom signed orders from Slocum & Stilwell.

Tom didn't like the man or his methods, but it looked like the solution to his problem. This line would at least put him on a par with Slocum & Stilwell, it was a case of fighting fire with fire, and it would mean the salvation of The Lincoln Hardware Company. He knew that with even prices he could get a good share of the Steubenville trade. What Slocum had done he could do. There were some things about this call from the representative of Snare & Tobey that Tom did not quite understand, so he questioned Mr. Bagby further. "Had a satisfactory trade with Slocum & Stilwell?"

"Certainly. You ought to know that better than anyone else. They've scooped all the trade. I just showed you the kind of orders they've been placing."

"Then why are you coming to The Lincoln Hardware Company if the Slocum orders are coming in all right?"

"It's just a matter of business. Slocum & Stilwell can't sell everybody. My house would rather have two customers than one, and, naturally, I want to make every sale I can."

"Then why didn't you come sooner?"

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"Now, see here, Mr. Stewart, I've done business with Slocum & Stilwell for years, and it was perfectly natural I should take this new line to them first. Before you make a decision come over to the American House and look over my sample line. It's all laid out for your inspection."

"Well—"

"Come over and take dinner with me."

"Not from what I know of the American House, but I will come right after I get back from lunch. Call it one o'clock."

"All right, I'll be there, and I'll guarantee to make your call worth while."

Tom turned the matter over very carefully on his way home to lunch. He didn't like the salesman, he didn't like the cheap line of goods, and he couldn't believe he had been given the real reason why Mr. Bagby, of Snare & Tobey, had made him a call.

"It'll give me a line to buck Slocum & Stilwell with, and that will be some satisfaction after letting them have their own way all this time." But Tom was silent at that mid-day meal and anxious to get away from the kindly scrutiny of his mother's eyes.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE NEW LINE

MR. BAGBY, of Snare & Tobey, met Tom in the lobby of the American House. "Come right up to the sample-room and I'll show you a list of money-makers that will open your eyes."

"All right, show me the way," and Tom followed the salesman up the winding stairway.

It was an attractive display from several points of view. First and always there was the price, low enough for successful competition with Slocum & Stilwell. In the second place, the cases in which the goods were packed, in size and color and style corresponded very closely in appearance to the packages in which well-advertised and standard goods were sold. Thirdly, the goods themselves were very presentable, so much so that Tom wondered how there could be so great a difference in price.

"It's price that sells goods nowadays," said Mr. Bagby, "and this line is *just as good* as lots of hardware that's sold for a great sight more."

MAKING GOOD IN THE VILLAGE

"How about these tools, will they hold the edge?"

"Sure—plenty long enough, anyway. You don't want them to last forever or you'd never sell any more of them. They're plenty good enough and they look like standard tools. What's more, they sell."

As Mr. Bagby finished, a waiter entered the sample-room bearing a tray on which were two long-stemmed glasses and a bottle. There was also a box of cigars. "Help yourself," said Mr. Bagby.

"No, thanks, I don't drink."

"Well, have a smoke, anyway."

"No, kind of you, Mr. Bagby, but let's get down to business."

"That suits me. Do you know, Mr. Stewart, I don't like this treating business any better than you do, but most of my customers expect it, so I have to make the offer. It costs the firm good money, too."

"It seems like poor business to me. I know Fort & Saxe would never stand for it from their salesmen."

"Yes, but they have a well-established line of standard goods, while I'm introducing a new, unknown line. Were you with Fort & Saxe?"

"Yes, that's where I learned the business."

THE NEW LINE

"Well, then, I can't tell you anything about quality stuff, but for a cheap line at a price, you can't beat the goods I'm showing you." Mr. Bagby's air of frankness seemed genuine, but Tom would have liked him better if he had left the liquor alone.

"Do you stand back of these goods in any way?"

"The house always makes it right if anything goes wrong, but we don't give a written guarantee. It's all fast-selling stock, with low prices and a good margin of profit. What more can you ask?"

"How soon could you make deliveries?"

"About ten days or two weeks," answered Mr. Bagby, getting out his order book and pencil.

"Couldn't you do better than that? Can't you make it one week?"

"I'll take it up with the house. Maybe we could rush your order in ahead of some others. I'll promise to do my best."

Tom took a copy of the last issue of the *Steubenville Eagle* out of his pocket and gave his order. He ordered everything that Slocum & Stilwell were advertising, and then made a good selection of his own. Comfortable terms were arranged for, and Tom left the American House feeling that he had made good headway against the competition that was

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slowly strangling his business. He went immediately to his store where he met Mr. Lincoln, who, apparently, had important news to communicate. "Tom, we're a corporation; just received a copy of our certificate of incorporation."

"Good! and I've just bought a line that will give us something to sell. We can compete with Slocum & Stilwell," and Tom told of his purchase in detail.

"Well, Tom, you know best, but I can't say I have much confidence in cheap goods. I've heard some complaining about the goods Slocum is selling. However, you're a better business man than I am, and I'll have to trust to your judgment."

"I hate cheap goods as much as anyone. We never sold anything we couldn't stand back of at Fort & Saxe's. But what are we going to do? Slocum is busy selling this cheap line and we're standing still."

"Slocum has certainly beaten us for the present, but I do hate tawdry hardware," said Mr. Lincoln emphatically.

Tom went home that evening in two minds. He felt he had done his best to save the situation, but hated the way in which he had done it, for, after all, he knew very well the line he had just bought

THE NEW LINE

was not such as a first-class concern could stand back of. It was cheap, and nearly every article and every package was in imitation of well-known and standard lines. Try as he would, he could not get it out of his mind that he was buying stock that was not what it pretended to be.

Arrived at his gate he was met, as usual, by the friendly bark of Nap, who had now become as good a village dog as he had been a city resident; but Tom's response was half-hearted, and at the supper-table it was apparent that he was troubled in mind.

"What's biting you?" asked Guy unsympathetically. "You got an eight-day grouch."

"Be quiet, Guy. Tom has a great deal to think of these days," said Mrs. Stewart.

"Tom needs another special sale to make him happy, and I'll be cashier again," said Mary.

"I certainly need some sort of a sale," replied Tom, "and I think I've prepared the way for one today."

"That sounds good," said Mrs. Stewart. "I know you've been worried lately, and while I'm sure you'll win out in the end, I know it must be hard to be patient."

MAKING GOOD IN THE VILLAGE

"It's all that Slocum's fault, he wants to hog all the business in town," growled Guy fiercely. "I'd like to break his head."

"Don't do anything rash that'll disgrace our family name," urged Mary.

"Ah—h!" said Guy.

"Tell me more about your new plans," said Mrs. Stewart. "It may help you to talk things over."

So Tom told of the new cheap line. He told of it as something absolutely necessary to do to save the business situation, but he could not conceal from his mother that the whole transaction was distasteful, and that his mind was sadly divided as to the question of right and wrong involved. "It means I'll be able to compete with Slocum & Stilwell on even terms. It means he can't drive me out of business."

"But Slocum & Stilwell advertise their goods as though they were their regular standard brands only with a reduction in price."

"One thing I know, and that is, they've scooped all the trade, and The Lincoln Hardware Company is standing still."

"Tom," said his mother, with something of a change in her voice, "when will this new line of goods arrive?"

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"I suppose in a couple of weeks; the salesman seemed to think he could do better, but I don't believe the new stock will get there any sooner than that. Why do you ask?"

"Tom, you've been working very hard and worrying more than is necessary. You have lost your poise, you need a vacation. A few days of complete change and you could see things more nearly as they are. As it is you can't see straight."

"You mean you don't like the looks of this new cheap line I'm putting in. It's all very nice to sell only the best, but I've got to sell what people will buy. The store has got to pay."

"I'm not at all worried about the store, but I want you to do as I say and get away for a few days."

"I can't leave things now. I'm too busy."

"No, you're not busy enough; now's your time, before the new stock arrives."

"Well, I'll talk it over with Mr. Lincoln."

"If you'll do that I'll be satisfied. Promise me to talk it over with him tomorrow."

"I promise."

CHAPTER XXXII

OFF TO THE HILLS

TOM was hard at work, as usual, when Mr. Lincoln arrived the morning following his conversation with his mother and, true to his promise, Tom brought up the question of a vacation. "I don't need one, and I don't want to go off and play now. I want to work harder than ever and win this fight against Slocum & Stilwell."

"Now, Tom, look here, we haven't any quarrel with Slocum & Stilwell."

"I'd like to know what you call it?"

"Slocum is having a little run on a cheap line, and if it makes us rather quiet for the time it takes the people to learn that cheap stock isn't cheap in the end. We'll have to be patient, that's all."

"But don't you see he's driving us out of business?"

"No, that's what he says he's doing, and that's what he wants you to think he's doing and,

OFF TO THE HILLS

Tom, you're doing just what he wants you to do."

"He's brought our business to a standstill, that's one thing I know."

"Oh, not so bad as that! We're selling some standard goods right along, and we don't have to apologize for what we sell either."

"All I can see is, that we're in a fight to the finish with Slocum & Stilwell, and I'm going to fight to the last ditch."

"What were you saying about a vacation?"

"I was saying I didn't need one, but that I promised mother to talk it over with you."

"What did she say about it?"

"Oh, she thinks I ought to take a few days off!"

"Why did she think you needed a rest?" asked Mr. Lincoln keenly.

"She doesn't understand the situation I'm up against, and how necessary it is for me to be here. She thinks I could go away till the new stock arrives," answered Tom evading the question.

"But why did she think you needed a change right now?" persisted Mr. Lincoln.

"Why, she thinks, that is, she says, I can't see straight, and if I ran away from the store for a while she thinks I would be able to see things differently."

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"So do I," said Mr. Lincoln emphatically. "You pack up and get out of here, and don't you dare to show yourself in this place again for two whole weeks. You've been an asset up to now, but until you've had a change of air you're a liability of the worst kind." Mr. Lincoln rose, put both hands on Tom's shoulders and looked him in the eyes. "Tom, get off into the hills. An old friend of yours will call at your house at two o'clock tomorrow afternoon. Have an old suit on your back; take a sweater along, and underclothes for two weeks. Now God bless you, son, and don't think of this shop till I see you again. Just play. It's necessary for the future of this business that you play for two weeks."

"I don't quite understand what you're up to, but I thank you just the same," said Tom, who was beginning to feel that Mr. Lincoln was the kind of man that one would like for a father.

When Tom came home and laughingly explained how Mr. Lincoln had fired him bodily out of the store, and that he was to await the appearance on the morrow, precisely at two in the afternoon, of a mysterious stranger, Mrs. Stewart smiled happily. "I always did like Mr. Lincoln," she said. "He may not be smart when it comes to making money

OFF TO THE HILLS

in a small store, but he does understand some things."

Tom didn't know whom to look for or what to expect, as he sat on the front porch the following afternoon awaiting the fateful hour of two. The fact was that he was mentally tired, somewhat depressed, and a little discouraged. For the first time in a long while, he was taking orders from some one else, and as he relaxed he began to realize that he had been at high tension, and for the moment he was in a state of mind where he didn't seem to care much what happened next. As he waited, Sam came down the street and turned in at the gate. He was carrying a bundle on his shoulders which was bulky rather than heavy. "It's from Mr. Lincoln—he told me to tell you not to open it till you got there."

"Got where?"

"I don't know, that's all he said. I supposed you'd know what he meant."

"Tell him I won't, and thank him for me."

"All right." And Sam sauntered off in the direction of the store.

"More mystery! Hello, Nap! What you smelling that bundle for, think it's for you?"

Nap wagged his tail, and looked up at his master

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with brown eyes that always held a question and complete devotion.

"Nap, do you think I need a vacation?"

Nap answered the question by running around the house three times, and then appearing with a very ancient and very dry bone in his teeth which he dropped ceremoniously at his master's feet. "That settles it. I need one and I'm going to have one. Well, I declare, if here isn't Hiram Johnson a day ahead of his regular time! Hello, Mr. Johnson, glad to see you!"

Tom rose and went down to the gate as Hiram Johnson brought his team to a standstill.

"Jump aboard, young man. It's jest two o'clock, an' I can't wait."

"What's the joke?" asked Tom, surprised in spite of himself.

"No time to explain now. I got my orders and you get aboard."

"Well, I seem to be taking orders from everybody I meet these days. Guess I better do as I'm told," and Tom laughed. "I'll just say good-by to the folks."

But it wasn't necessary for him to re-enter the house, for Mrs. Stewart, Mary and Guy came to the

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door, as if by appointment, and wished him good-by and a good time.

"Don't come back here for two weeks," said his mother, "and be sure you have plenty of clothes on you at night."

"What a yarn we'll have to listen to when he returns," said Guy.

"I'll go with you next time," said Mary.

"What's it all about?" asked Tom, after the little white house had disappeared around a curve in the road.

"Well, Mr. Tom Stewart, you're on a vacation, an' it's up to me to see you have a good time. An' by Heck, I'm a-goin' to see that you do!"

"Suits me."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE HILLS

THE house was low and white, and its many wings sprawled among a number of old pine trees as though it were on friendly terms with them all and had no thought of displacing them for any mere architectural reason. To the rear of the house were several large red barns and in the barnyard were corncribs and in the adjacent fields were great hayricks. Chicken houses and tool sheds held their places in among the larger buildings, and taken altogether, there was a quiet air of prosperity and comfort about the place which appealed strongly to the tired young business man, as Hiram Johnson drove him past the house and into the barnyard.

"Hello, Mr. Stewart!" came the pleasant voice of Mrs. Maria Johnson. "So you an' Hiram is goin' campin'!"

"First I heard of it, but it sounds good to me."

THE HILLS

"Wall, now, Maria, if you ain't gone an' give it all away," complained Hiram.

"Why, don't he know where he's goin'?"

"Not yet. It was a secret."

"Well, I declare!"

"I'll enjoy it just as much. Say, it'll be great! I've never been camping in my life." And Tom felt a thrill of pleasure of a different kind from any he had previously known.

"Wall, Hiram can show you all there is to it. He's been wastin' his time that way since he was knee high to nothin' at all."

"You'll have to tell me everything, Hiram, for I don't know the first thing about camping."

"All right, Tom. First thing is to go in an' wash up for supper. The next is to get up right early tomorrow mornin'. I'll call you. Here, give me that bundle. It's part o' our outfit." And Hiram secured control of the package, which was Mr. Lincoln's parting gift to Tom.

The hired man now arrived on the scene and helped Hiram unhitch, while Tom went into the house with Mrs. Johnson. It was a blue-walled, low-ceilinged room that she led Tom to, and the liberal bed had a persuasive look that urged early retiring,

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and Tom thought would be very hard to get out of in the gray of the morning. It was all part of a complete farm home, and the rich cream and the sun-cooked strawberry jam served at the supper-table told the rest of the story—of a place where the living was wholesome from work to play, and from one year's end to the other.

It seemed to Tom that he had hardly lain down before some one was lustily calling him to get up. He didn't want to move. It seemed to him that he would rather stay right where he was for a week than turn to any other pleasure or employment on earth, but here he was a guest, so he compelled himself to get up and come down to breakfast.

"Strawberries and cream to start with," said Hiram. "An' if you can beat Maria's coffee an' sody biscuits, I'll give up right now. That there bacon is our own make, an' them eggs is so fresh it's like cruelty to children to cook 'em at all. Right out o' the nest, an' all hand-laid, as the feller said."

"Looks good, smells good and is good, and I'm hungry," said Tom.

"Set down, Mr. Stewart."

"Please call me Tom. I want to feel at home here."

THE HILLS

"All right, Tom. That sounds kind o' more natural than any Mister."

"I like it better. By the way, Hiram, where are you going to take me?"

"That's tellin'! I was once a lumber jack for as long as I could stand it. That's where I learned to swing a ax so as to win a prize, an' I learned a little how to handle a canoe, an' a lot how to be crazy to live out o' doors."

The early breakfast over, Hiram led Tom to the horse-block at the rear of the house, and from this they climbed into the front seat of a two-seated wagon, to which was harnessed a good-looking pair of ponies. The hired man took the rear seat.

"Good-by, Maria, see you again in two weeks. Be home in time for church Sunday after next."

"Good-by, Hiram, be keerful in that canoe. Good-by, Tom, don't let him work you too hard."

"Good-by, Mrs. Johnson, it won't be work, it'll be all play."

A click of the tongue and the ponies were off at a good gait.

On the bottom of the wagon Tom noticed two large brown canvas bags, the mouths of which were drawn together with stout cords. They were as large

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as the regulation canvas mail-bags, but to Tom were decidedly more interesting. "What you got in those bags?" he asked.

"Them bags contains what we're to live on fer two whole weeks, food, covering at night an' housin', by which I means a tent."

"Where are we going?"

"Into the hills."

"Well, I don't care where it is so long as it's outdoors and I'm one of the party."

It was a long dusty ride, and they stopped at noon to rest and care for the ponies as well as to have their own luncheon. This Mrs. Johnson had prepared, and the hungry men pronounced it a success. The meal finished they were not long in getting a new start, but the shadows of the trees were lengthening before they finally drew rein. This was largely because they could go no farther. They were now in the hill forests and the road had long since dwindled to a mere trail, and it finally lost itself altogether among the shadowy tree trunks. It was in a little clearing on the bank of a small river that their first night was spent. Here was a roughly built shack about twenty by fifteen feet as to floor space. It contained a rusty stove, several bunks along the wall, a

THE HILLS

table, some chairs and a long bench. Frying-pans hung back of the stove, and a simple assortment of cooking utensils and tableware rested on a shelf. There were plenty of blankets on the racks overhead, but the most interesting item in the whole list was the one Tom saw first. It was so large that it had to be taken out of the shack before anybody could get in comfortably, for it was much in the way. It was the canoe.

"We'll have somethin' light an' tasty before re-tirin'," said Hiram.

"I could eat dried lizards," said Tom.

"Jest you wait, then, an' see who's cook around these parts."

While Hiram made the fire and opened one of the big brown bags, the hired man picketed the ponies and got ready for an early morning start for home. Tom explored the river bank and the clearing about the shack as well as he could in the failing light. When he returned the mingled fragrance of frying ham, eggs and coffee made its immediate appeal to Tom's inner man.

"Smells good," he said, "but that sort of food isn't considered the best possible to take just before going to bed."

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"Thet's why I like campin', you can fergit all the old rules that applies to people livin' at home."

"I don't believe coffee or anything else will keep me awake tonight." Tom was right, for he slept like a log, and so, for that matter, did Hiram, and it was broad daylight when they at length awoke. The hired man had gone with the ponies and wagon.

"Glad he didn't wait for us. I told him to be here Thursday mornin', week after next, so we got to keep track o' the time an' not lose a day or two in our calculations."

"Guess we can do that easy enough."

"Don't you be too sure. I've lost a day or two many a time out in the woods. I been extry good some days, a-thinkin' 'em Sundays, an' come to reckon up afterward found out it'd been a Monday or Tuesday, an' no special call to be good whatever."

"Awful waste," commented Tom.

"Yep; but next thing is breakfast. What'll you have?"

"Any ham and eggs left from supper?"

"I kin give you thet if you like, but we don't want too much of the same thing, even if it's good."

"Well, I'd like a little ham, anyway."

"An' a few fresh eggs would seem all right."

THE HILLS

"And some coffee."

"Yep, so let's call it eggs an' coffee an' ham for a change."

"Suits me."

"So be it."

The breakfast was just as satisfactory as the evening meal had been, and in a very short time the two campers stood on the shore of the river with their canoe at their feet and paddles in their hands. The two large brown bags were carefully placed, and the shack behind them was closed up and ready for when they should return.

"Tom, you don't know anything about a canoe, so you'll just be a passenger for a while. You can paddle when the paddlin' is straight ahead, but when I say 'Hold out,' git your blade out o' the water quick."

"All right, I'll obey orders."

Downstream they went with the rapidly moving water. It was a fast hill stream, which broke into white caps at short intervals as the shallow current struck a rocky section or where the land fell away sharply. The speed at which they traveled was exhilarating, and the murmur along quiet shores, or the seething hiss and dash of the white caps over and

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among the rocks made pleasant music for the voyagers.

"There's something ahead!" exclaimed Tom.

"Yep, wild duck an' her brood; see 'em here every season. They can swim, too, the little beggars."

"Let's see if we can catch up to them."

"Look! Look overhead!" excitedly whispered Hiram.

Tom glanced upward in time to mark the swift swoop of an enormous bird which, in a flash, had dropped from the clouds and, in the twinkling of an eye, had struck the mother duck where she swam in the midst of her brood. These little down-puffs scattered at once for the overhanging bank, and disappeared like the blowing out of a candle. With some difficulty the eagle, for such it was, lifted his prize from the water, but finding the burden too great, or being satisfied with the sport of capture, he dropped his victim at about the height of the tree tops and she, lighting easily on the water, dived and did not appear again.

"Now, what do you think of that?" exclaimed Tom.

"Great, ain't it! You wouldn't see anythin' like that in Steubenville in forty years. That's why I

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likes to get out here, where things you can't scussly believe happens right afore your eyes."

"Oh, it's wonderful! Look down this stream, straight ahead, green walls on both sides, running water, birds we can see and animals we can't, and not another soul in sight. It's great!"

"Can't beat it! Now you be ready to do what I tell you, an' do it quick. We'll be in the upper rapids in a few minutes."

CHAPTER XXXIV

FAST WATER

TOM hardly knew how they got into it, but he saw white water ahead, and as they approached the seething, dashing turmoil he noted that Hiram rose up in the canoe and with hand shading his eyes gazed long and steadily ahead, as though seeking a safe course through the wilderness of spray. In another minute he heard him say, "Take out your paddle, I'll take charge; jest you keep steady and don't move no matter what happens."

It was a nerve-trying experience to sit there and do nothing, with the rocks seeming to rise up on both sides in such rapid succession as to give the impression that they were living things, while the waters writhed, twisted and hissed to right and left. Tom hardly breathed. He trusted his friend, but it seemed they must strike any moment. But with nerves tense and straining eyes he suddenly found himself, canoe and all, in quiet water.

FAST WATER

"Thar!" said Hiram breathing heavily, "I knew I hadn't lost the trick. I'm goin' to try the big rapids lower down."

"Are they worse than this?" asked Tom a little anxiously.

"They're bigger, but they'll be more fun on that account. Like this sort o' sport?"

"Great!" said Tom, "only I wish I could do something. I hate sitting still."

"That's hard, all right. It's always harder bein' patient than a-doin' things. We'll rest on this lake a while, git our dinner an' do a little fishin'. Then we'll go on down, an' tomorrow we'll be at the big rapids. Thet'll be the real thing."

"I'll stay with you wherever you go, but I do wish I knew enough to help over the hard places."

"You'll learn. Shall we try for a fish or two for dinner?"

"That was pretty good ham we had this morning."

"Yep, but we got to make sort o' a change once in a while."

"Oh, I suppose so, but let's call it ham if we don't catch any fish."

"All right, but we will catch fish. See, here!"

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And Hiram opened one of the brown bags and drew out a rod case. This he opened, and drew forth a beautiful bamboo rod. Then he opened another package and brought out a fine reel, lines, hooks, a book of assorted flies and several lures for bait-casting. "This is Mr. Lincoln's present to you for this trip. It's all from your own stock an' therefore first-class."

"I've sold that sort of sporting goods, but they never looked like anything to me till now. Yes, let's have fish for dinner. I want to catch a fish, and I want to catch it with that rod!"

Several of the words Hiram had used stuck in Tom's mind and set him thinking. He had said, "It's all from your own stock and therefore first-class." Tom wondered if Hiram knew anything about the cheap line he was just about to take hold of. "I'll tell him about it, and see what he thinks," he said to himself.

The little lake, which was but a widening of the river bed, was as calm as any millpond, and its quiet, shadowy shores seemed to promise to Hiram's eager eyes lurking places for fish untold. After showing Tom how to assemble his fishing outfit, and getting his own in readiness, he gently edged

FAST WATER

the canoe toward the nearer shore. "We'll try bait-castin' first, and after we make sure of a mess o' fish for dinner, we'll experiment with flies," he said.

"Aren't the flies as good?"

"Some thinks so, but I kin always see a meal quicker with real live bait or a good imitation, though I have had some luck with flies. However, as we want fish for dinner, let's try bait-castin'; then we'll fool with flies later, say after dinner."

Tom watched with intense interest as with easy motion Hiram cast a little artificial minnow under the overhanging shrubbery. The bait hardly rested a second on the water before, with quadruple reel, Hiram had it moving rapidly toward the boat. "You see it's got to look like a real minnow to the fish you're after or he won't strike at it, and to look like a real minnow it must be movin'. The minute it strikes the water you must start it on its homeward way."

Tom watched it all carefully as Hiram made cast after cast, all appearing to be done so easily and smoothly that it did not seem at all difficult until he tried it himself. There was the inevitable beginner's snarl, and Tom went at it again and again,

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determined to master a sport for which a strange hunger had been aroused.

"Don't seem to be much doin' here," remarked Hiram after ten minutes of fruitless work. "Let's try t'other side, no accountin' for fish." A few minutes' work at the paddle brought them across the lake, and this time Hiram worked his canoe in close under the overhang, casting ahead. "Now, thar's a likely lookin' clump o' alder, let me try thet with a long-distance cast an' see what happens."

A long, smooth cast was made, the little wagtail bait falling close to the bushes. Hardly had it touched the water than there was a splash, and an arc of silver rose and fell before their eyes. "Wall-eyed-pike!" exclaimed Hiram, "an' a good one. Now watch me tire him out."

Back and forth darted the pike, but always when the strain came he found himself pulling against the spring of the bamboo rod and there was nothing for him to break. When he sought deep water Hiram gave him the line, and when he rose he took in the slack, but held his rod low. "He ain't got no chance against brains, even so poor a set as I got. All you got to do to land him easy is to keep him workin' his head off ag'in the spring o' the rod. But if you

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want to lose him, yank, or give him somethin' to yank ag'in, an' it's good-by pike!"

Tom was a good listener, and in a few minutes he saw the lecture he was listening to illustrated, as Hiram lifted a very tired fish over the side of the canoe. "Almost four pounds," he remarked. "Come, let's git dinner. I kin eat a pound o' fish an' you kin have the other three."

"I feel as though I could eat the whole of him," said Tom.

"Yep, that's the way you feel, but you couldn't do it to save your immortal soul, fish is that fillin'."

"There's a good-looking beach," said Tom indicating a shelving line of white ahead.

"That's our dinner-table," said Hiram.

"I like the sound of a canoe scraping on pebbles," said Tom, as they ran their light craft ashore.

"I like every bloomin' thing about this here outdoors," said Hiram with deep feeling.

An upward writhing wreath of smoke was all that betrayed their presence on that lonely little shelf of sand, and after the broiled fish, hot tea and biscuits with strawberry jam for dessert, they stretched at length on the warm ground, to enjoy the midsummer quiet and to rest and dream before going far-

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ther. Suddenly Tom turned to Hiram, "I'm thinking of putting in a cheap line like Slocum's," he said. "Would you do it?"

There was so long a pause that Tom put the question again.

"I heard you, but it's a big order, an' I was thinkin'. Suppose I tell you in my own way."

"Go ahead. I didn't ask for fun. I've been thinking about it hard. I want to get a right answer."

CHAPTER XXXV

AN ANSWER

YOU see me stand up an' pick my course before I ran them rapids back there?"

"Yes, I supposed that was what you were doing."

"Well, now, up in Canady them Indians an' half-breeds know more about a canoe than I'll ever know if I live to be fourteen hundred years old, an' they allus picks a course an' sticks to it regardless, an' they most generally gits through with a whole skin, an' some o' them rapids would make what we been through look like a bathtub half full o' warm water an' suds."

"Quite a difference, I should say."

"Yep, an' if a Indian or one o' them half-breeds gits foolish or scared an' changes his course halfway downstream, an' has his canoe broke in two ag'in a rock an' his head smashed ag'in another rock, he don't git no sympathy. I hearn a Indian remark at a feller what changed his mind a-shootin' down a bad rapid

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an' got his head smashed to a pancake, 'Served him right,' he said, 'he ain't got no business runnin' rapids if he's got to change his mind.' That's how they look at it—pick your course an' stick to it.

"Now, see here, Mr. Tom Stewart," and there was an earnestness in Hiram Johnson's voice such as Tom had not heard before, "if you was in the middle o' a river in a canoe and found your guide a-changin' his mind every few minutes, I reckon you'd worry some.

"If you heard him remark one minute, 'I'm goin' to shoot them rapids ahead an' I guess I'll hold to the right shore,' an' then after hesitatin' some he'd up an' remark ag'in, 'No, I reckon I'll hold to the left,' you'd say to yourself, 'Heaven help this canoe an' me, for this here guide don't know what he wants to do, or if he does he can't make himself do it.'

"If you found yourself caught that way, I reckon if your guide run you inshore or near quiet water for a minute you'd jump, I know I would, an' be ding-donged grateful to feel real ground under my feet once more.

"Now, I reckon your own body is a sort o' canoe, an' this here river is what you might call life. Your mind is what's guidin' the canoe; that is to say, your

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guide is in your own head. If that guide is steady, can lay a course an' stick to it, you're safe.

"The time o' danger in your canoe is when you discover your guide doesn't know where he's goin', an' if he does, can't stick to no course to git thar.

"The time o' danger in your life is when you find your mind, which you might regard as your guide, can't figure out where you're goin' and can't lay no course nor follow one.

"You can begin to worry when you find today you are doin' what you promised yourself yesterday you wouldn't never do. When you ain't got a will that can boss your body, believe me, son, it's time to git nervous.

"You sold only the goods at Fort & Saxe's that was high grade, none o' this here 'just as good' stuff, hey?"

"Yes," admitted Tom, "all first-class stock; nothing we couldn't stand back of."

"An' you started in with The Lincoln Hardware Company on the same lines?"

"Yes, all standard goods."

"Well, you been listenin' to what I been tryin' to say?"

"Yes."

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"Then you got all the answer I can give you. Let's break camp an' go on downstream, I hate lecturin'."

It was well on toward dark when they pitched their seven by seven tent, cooked their evening meal, and after a chat about the fire turned in, so tired and sleepy that the rough and quickly prepared bed of spruce on which they laid their blankets looked as inviting as Mrs. Maria Johnson's comfortable quarters at the farm.

It was very early in the morning when Tom awoke, and he lifted the flap of the tent cautiously so as not to awaken Hiram, who was breathing regularly in a sound and comfortable slumber. As he did so, a startled deer, whose curiosity had brought him close to the tent which had grown up so suddenly during the night, snorted, and in a few magnificent bounds reached the timber and disappeared. "A deer!" thought Tom. "This is real outdoor life. Wonder if I could get breakfast and surprise Hiram. I never cooked anything in my life. I'll build a fire, anyway."

Tom had seen Hiram build several fires, so he made a good beginning by cutting two sections from a fallen tree. It was good exercise, but he found he was not so good an axman as Hiram. Between

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these two heavy logs he started a blaze with chips and smaller wood, and soon had a roaring fire going. He then put on a pot of water, but when he looked at the bag of self-raising flour his courage failed. "Guess I'll let Hiram make the biscuits," he said. "I'll go down to the shore and try bait-casting. I want to learn that trick."

It was very early in the morning, and though light enough, the sun had not yet risen. The fire crackled behind him as he jointed his rod and stepped down to the smoothly running black water. It was all so quiet and there was such an air of mystery and promise of undiscovered country where the river lost itself to the eye round the bend to the right. "I'll try the same little wagtail Hiram used yesterday," said Tom, "wish I could make a decent cast."

One effort followed another, and there was always a snarl in the reel as the unaccustomed thumb failed to check the spool in time and the back-lash furnished exasperating loops for Tom to pick out before he could make another attempt. Finally, however, he did manage to get his bait fairly on the water and to start it moving toward shore with a turn of the reel. When halfway in there came a sudden deep-water tug. Tom saw his line straighten

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out and his rod double in a graceful curve. There was no fish to be seen, but Tom knew it was there and he thrilled to the new experience.

"Oh, how I want this fellow! I'd like to show him to Hiram just to show I've been listening to his instructions. I'll try and tire him out, but I'd rather yank him right out on the beach."

Tom kept that fish sawing back and forth until the strain gradually slackened and slowly and surely he reeled him in till he could see his catch flash and turn before him. "What a beauty!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, an' jest you hold him there easy like or he'll git away yet." It was Hiram's voice and he waded out a few feet into the stream with a landing net in his hand. "Don't try an' lift him, jest swing him over this way, easy like, thar! I got him! There's breakfast for a king."

"What is it?"

"Small mouth black bass, a good three pounds, an' a dandy catch. Some fighter, hey?"

"Seemed like it to me, but I thought you were asleep."

"Me, oh, I allus sleeps with one eye open. I hearn you choppin', an' it sounded good to hear somebody else doin' the work, but when I hearn the fire cracklin'

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I had to git up. Come on up, you got fish enough, an' I'll show you how to make old-fashioned johnny-cake."

"I wanted to try making biscuits, but I lost my nerve when I took a good look at the flour."

"Well, you got to have a recipe or have cookin' born in your system. Thet's me, I never make it twice alike, but it allus comes out good. See this here baker, it folds flat so it don't take up no room in particular, but when it's open an' up ag'in the fire the heat strikes the pan o' biscuits or johnny-cake below an' above, an' cooks 'em to a turn, you jest watch."

Tom watched and he also watched the bacon sizzle and the fish fry and the coffee come to a boil. It was wonderful, this getting breakfast at about five in the morning on a little sand beach on the side of a river.

CHAPTER XXXVI

CHEAP

THE river they were now gliding down was no longer a little river, for it had been added to by several mountain streams, and altogether they made a waterway of quite respectable proportions.

Their two bags, into which had been crowded everything they had brought along, including blankets, tent, ax, food, cooking utensils and fishing tackle were securely lashed to place. "I don't expect no upset, but I ain't takin' no chances," explained Hiram, while he tied the bags securely to the cross braces.

Tom thought it was the sound of a rising wind in the distance that came to his ears from somewhere ahead. "No, them's the rapids," Hiram answered. "The wind sets this way; we'll be in 'em presently."

Tom felt a little queer inside, but he determined to stick it out and trust to his friend to bring them safely through, besides, the rapids were beginning

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to have the same fascination for him which they have had for many another adventurer.

Louder grew the roar as they drew nearer to its source, until, on rounding a bend of the river, Tom could see the great avenue of turbid whiteness ahead. It was a wonderful and awe-inspiring sight, and there was such an air of power set free about it, that it was somehow threatening, almost appalling. It seemed like tempting Providence to venture farther, but Tom said nothing. He might as well have spoken his mind, for Hiram evidently had been thinking much the same thoughts. "It's all right if you know how, an' it ain't takin' no more risk than travelin' across town in New York, only you got to be able to read the signs and act quick. I'd ruther shoot them rapids than run across Broadway forty times at Fulton Street."

"I'll trust you to know what you're doing," replied Tom quietly.

Hiram, as usual, had been standing gazing ahead steadily at the foaming torrent. "River's high, plenty o' water, but some rough; we'll hold to the right o' the center. All you got to do is to set still an' enjoy the scenery."

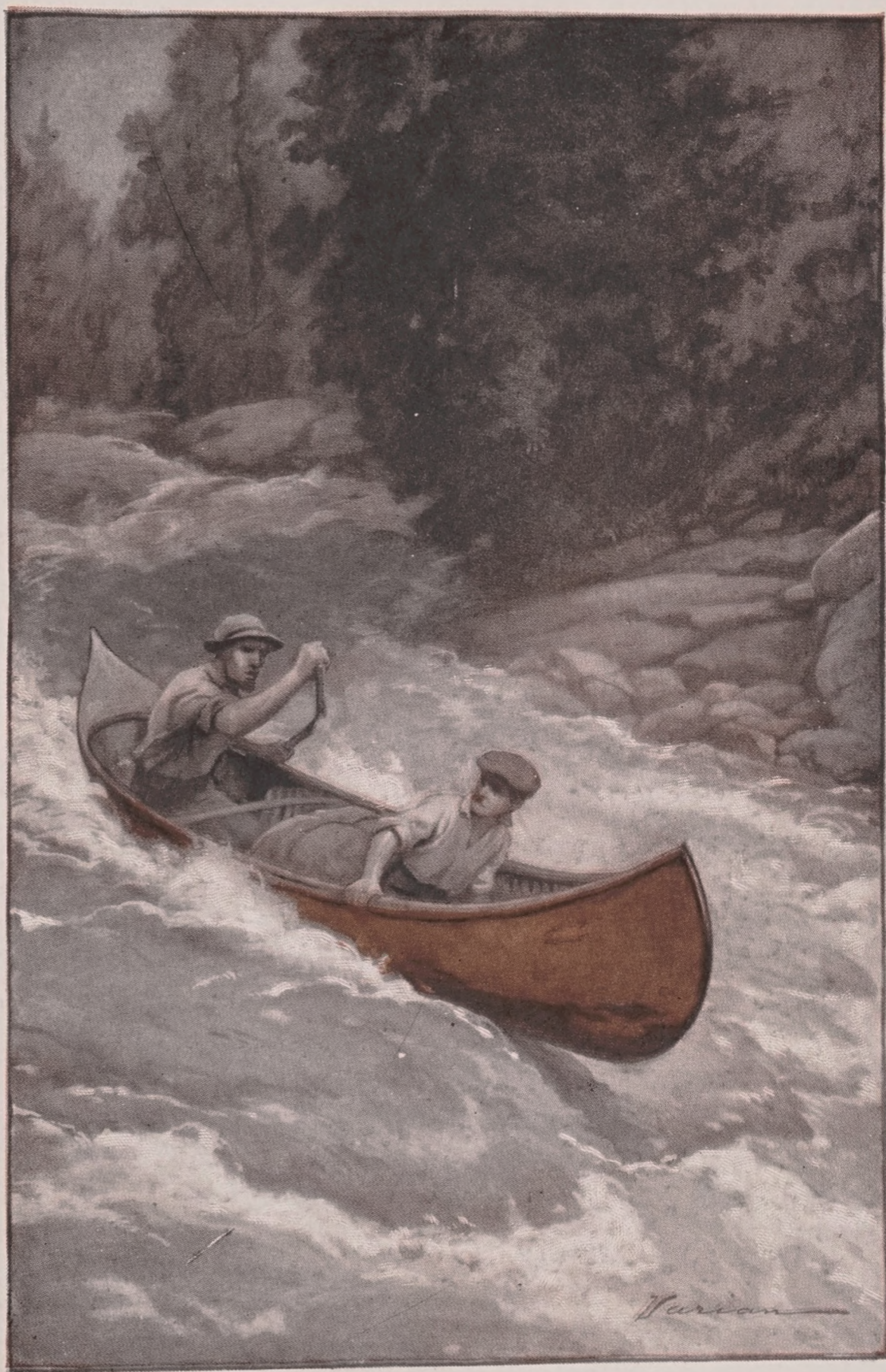
In, with a streak of green water that bent like a

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steel bow between two rocks, slipped the canoe, guided by Hiram. Tom sat forward on the bottom, and Hiram knelt on the bottom in the rear with paddle held over the side guiding the frail craft. They rode along their chosen streak of green water, shaving some rocks rather closely, but always going with a strong current, which of itself drew them on and away from the constantly threatening rocks. Sometimes it seemed that Hiram hardly used his blade, and at others a few swift, powerful strokes kept them head on and brought them safely around some dangerous turn.

"In a minute we'll be through the worst o' it," he remarked to Tom, as the size of the horse-manes increased to either side of them. "Now, here's our worst chance," he grunted between strokes, "but I'll drive her through—"

Snap! In a moment they were broadside on, in another the canoe had rolled over and Tom and Hiram were swept, gasping and struggling, downstream. Tom could not tell how it happened, but he found himself flung bodily on a shelf of rock over which a few inches of water were flowing. Drawing himself up and out of the current he found he could keep his footing without much difficulty



“Snap! In a moment they were broadside on”

and so, standing in water running halfway to his knees, he took stock of the situation. At first he could see nothing of Hiram or the canoe and his heart sank within him, turning he could make out a slippery and perilous route over rocks and through ribbons of running water to the right shore. Presently, from behind the dashing spray ahead and over the din of the rushing, grinding waters, came a faint halloo. Tom's heart leaped at the sound and he raised his voice in answer. There it was again and louder, but Tom could not see its owner.

"Are you safe?" cried Tom.

"Yes," came the faint answer. And then Tom decided to wait where he was for a few moments, for he did not feel at all sure about making that trip to the shore. "He'll know how," he said to himself, "and I don't want to take another dip."

Presently he could make out Hiram's form, partially hidden by the horse-manes and spray wreaths ahead, as he crawled and fought his way toward shore, and then he heard his hearty shout, "Hello, Tom! Stay where you be till I get to you."

Hiram had picked up a stout branch of a tree from alongshore and, using it to steady himself, he gradually worked his way out to where Tom stood

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on his precarious perch. Then, extending his branch until Tom got a good hold on it, he helped him across from one rock to another and through several swift, though fortunately shallow streams of water, till at length they stood on dry shore. "Thank God, you're here, Tom! Come with me, I want to show you something." Tom followed, for there was something ominous in Hiram's voice.

Down along the shore they went in silence to the spot where Hiram had made his landing. Here he stooped and picked up something and held it out toward Tom in his clenched fist. It was the handle of his paddle from which the blade had been broken off short and there in the wood was the tell-tale knot.

"Cheap goods!" said Hiram in utter contempt. "I bought it at Slocum & Stilwell's."

Tom's conscience smote him as though he himself had committed a crime.

"Cheap goods!" continued Hiram, in scorn of himself as well as of Slocum. "I bought it because it was cheap. I wondered at the time how it could be sold at the price. I paid for paint an' varnish, but I got no paddle, and you might be dead an' I responsible. But it was a bargain, oh, it was a bar-

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gain! It had the price. It was cheap, cheap, cheap!"

Tom had not thought such vehemence could come from the usually quiet-spoken Hiram, but here a volcano had been unearthed and Tom got a glimpse of the profound depths

"What about the canoe?" he asked, for he could think of nothing else to say.

"Oh, we'll git thet! I seen it lodged on some rocks down yonder, but, Tom, can you forgive me?"

"Hiram, let's talk about something else, you know I was thinking about putting in a cheap line. I think I know now why mother wanted me to take a vacation. I think I can see straight."

CHAPTER XXXVII

A WEIRD NIGHT

DOWNSTREAM, and lodged across a line of rocks near shore, they found their overturned canoe. On wading out and righting it they were rejoiced to see their two duffle-bags still securely lashed in place. "Thet goes to show it's worth while lookin' ahead a bit," said Hiram. "We ain't had no serious loss."

"Things must be pretty wet inside those bags," said Tom.

"Let's git 'em ashore and see what the damage is."

The canoe, with its wet freight, was soon piloted ashore. The mouths of the two bags were untied and it was found that very little water had penetrated. "Not much to complain of," said Hiram cheerfully.

"Yes, but we ve lost both paddles."

"That needn't bother us so long as we have an ax. I'll guarantee to make a pair o' paddles a sight bet-

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ter'n the two we brought with us; but now I'll cut a pole an' that'll take us down to Grand Lake. We'll keep inshore where it's shallow so we can use the pole."

Selecting a clean, straight hickory about two and a half inches in diameter, Hiram cut it down and trimmed it neatly with his ax. "Now, we'll put on a shoe, an' we'll have as good a pole as anyone need ask for." Opening up one of the bags and scattering most of its contents upon the shore, he finally located the object of his search. It was a cornucopia-shaped hollow piece of iron, dull pointed, and it was easily driven to place on the sharpened end of the newly cut pole. A spike driven through the hole prepared for it fastened the shoe securely. "There, now, we're ready. There's as much skill in manipulin' a stick like this as in handlin' a paddle; some thinks more."

Tom got into the canoe forward, while Hiram stood up in the stern and guided their craft among the rocks, keeping in shoal water, as the depth in the center of the river was too great for pole work. They were soon past the rapids, gliding along with the smooth current, and about an hour later they slid into the clear waters of Grand Lake.

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Midway down the lake a long sand bar ran out from the westerly bank, and on its sloping beach they ran their canoe ashore and pitched their tent, and on this picturesque spot they made their headquarters for more than a week. North and south extended the lake, and from their tent opening they could get a full sweep of the quiet waters in both directions.

They talked no more of their narrow escape in the rapids or of the cause, but lived like Indians, and Tom forgot there was such a thing as business.

"I'll learn you to swim," said Hiram.

"And to fish," added Tom.

"An' to handle a canoe."

"And to cook."

"An', what beats all, to git the love o' it into your system so it won't ever git away from you ag'in."

"You've done that already," said Tom.

"Then I've done good work."

The day came all too soon when Hiram remarked: "Now I reckon we'd best be movin' upstream. It'll be hard goin', but we're in good condition, an' I guess we can stand it."

"How about the big rapids?" asked Tom.

"Thet's where we portage."

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"And the small ones?"

"We'll pole right up them."

"Good! I want to see you do it."

So a start was made, and on Tuesday noon they were at the foot of the big rapids. The paddles they were now using were rough-hewn affairs, but there was no question as to their honesty. Drawing their canoe ashore, Hiram rigged a tumpline for Tom, so that the weight of the duffle-bag he was to carry would be distributed on his shoulders and back with the flat leather band drawn across his forehead. Hiram carried the canoe with its weight well balanced and resting on the paddles, which in turn rested in the grooves of his shoulders. So they proceeded around the big rapids until they could place the canoe in quiet water. A second trip was necessary to secure the second bag, and as all this took time they pitched camp that evening well tired and hungry, with another day's journey ahead of them before they could make the shack from which they had started.

That night was a weird one. In the first place, it was one of those unnaturally quiet nights. It seemed that hardly a leaf stirred or any creature moved, and yet Tom was sure the place about him was full

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of life. At any rate, he was very much awake, and he felt sure he never could go to sleep. There was the faintest swish from the river, and he could hear the individual pebbles as they turned on the shore. Then a little later he was confident he could hear something stepping ever so quietly and at long intervals, ever nearer and nearer the tent in which he was trying so hard to go to sleep. At length, in desperation, he decided to raise the flap of the tent and look out. As he did so he could hear, or thought he could, something draw back cautiously, but he could not be certain about this and suspected his nerves were playing him tricks. Night, on the ground, in the woods, is a strange place to find oneself.

There before him stretched the black, gurgling river, and as he looked, there flashed up from its surface a curving shower of silver, and there followed a loud splash, as the fish which had made the jump returned to his native element. All was now quieter than before, but presently, from right over Tom's head, came the mournful hoot of an owl. It was so near and so human a sound that Tom jumped and then recovered himself. "I'm nervous as a cat," he remarked; but the night entertainment was not

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yet over, for the hoot of that owl had called for a response from other owls, and these had startled a deer, who was drinking at the water's edge, and in fright he had trumpeted and crashed back into the woods. All this commotion drew forth the mocking laughter of a loon from farther up the river, and as this unearthly call reached Tom, he turned to look at Hiram where he lay in peaceful slumber, and he longed to wake him and ask what it was all about. The night closed in around these startling outcries and seemed by contrast even quieter than before, and Tom dropped the flap of the tent and crawled back under his covers. "It's a strange country," he remarked. "I wish I could sleep through it all like Hiram." He must have been granted his request very promptly, for the next thing he knew somebody was shaking him by the shoulder, "Get up, lazy-bones, time for breakfast."

"What was it all about?" asked Tom half awake.

"What all about?"

"Oh, last night something hooted at a fish because he jumped out of the water, then a fellow upstream blew a tin horn, and some crazy woman laughed fit to kill! It was a noisy place here after you went to sleep."

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"Ha, ha!" laughed Hiram, "loons, owls and deer—they can be noisy when they git started, an' sometimes they'll keep it up till you'd give a nickel to knock their fool heads off."

"It's all right in the morning, but it sounds mighty queer at night. What's the program for today?"

"Today we climb the upper rapids, and if nothin' happens we camp tonight in our shack."

"Good, I'll be glad and sorry, too. Glad to see the folks and sorry to see the end of this trip."

"Like it, hey?"

"Never knew there was so much fun lying around loose in the world."

"I thought it'd git you; so did Jethro. I reckon you ain't lost nothin' by takin' a vacation when you needed one pretty bad."

"No, I believe it came just in time," and Tom spoke with conviction.

Hiram did not answer, and that morning there was so much straining at the paddles against the swift current that there was little talk till they camped at noon, and then the main topic of conversation was the climbing of the rapids whose voice reached them from farther upstream.

As Hiram had remarked when he cut, trimmed

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and shod his pole, the use of this implement of the canoe-man's craft required as much skill as the use of the paddle; and when at length the rapids were reached and Hiram propelled his craft up, over, and through them without mishap, it aroused Tom's admiration.

"It doesn't seem possible to work a boat up rapids the way you're doing, and if I hadn't seen it I couldn't have believed it."

"It's nothin' to what they do right along in Canada. Why, I could tell you things I've seen them Indians do that'd make your hair curl."

"I want you to show me how."

"I will some day. This ain't our last trip, I hope."

"I certainly hope not."

"I won't give no lessons now, for we got to be at the shack tonight. My man will be there with the ponies, an' we'll make an early get away tomorrow morning."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE DECISION

A QUIET, restful night at the shack, another at Hiram's farm, and then a brisk drive right after the noon meal brought Tom to his own front gate just before supper. The little family group was out on the front porch watching for him, and Nap wagged his tail so hard that Hiram insisted the wag commenced just back of his ears.

"Hello, Tom!" came the welcoming chorus, as Hiram brought his team to a short stop right at the gate.

"Hello, Mother! Hello, Sis! Hello, Guy! There, Nap, get down a minute!"

"Do come in, Mr. Johnson," urged Mrs. Stewart, "we never can thank you enough."

"Don't thank me, I jest been havin' the time o' my life, an' Tom's goin' ag'in. I got what I been lookin' for, a man that likes campin' the way I do. Come in? No, not now. If I did, I wouldn't git no attention, Tom's about all you really need in the

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way o' entertainment. Good-by, see you next week," and Hiram drove off, having done the right thing in the right way.

"Tell us all about it," urged Guy.

"Let him alone, Guy. Give him a chance to wash up. Supper'll be ready by the time you are washed, Tom," said Mary.

"It is good to have you back safe and sound, and how well you look," said Mrs. Stewart.

"I'm feeling fine. Now tell me how you are, Mother?" And Tom looked at her searchingly.

"I'm truly gaining. I don't know when I've felt so well."

"That's splendid, now everything else will be all right," and Tom ran up to his room.

This was the first home-coming after the first separation in that little family and it was a great event. Tom had to start at the beginning and tell in detail the whole story of his trip. It commenced at the supper-table and continued until the door-bell rang.

"It's Mr. Lincoln," announced Guy. "Now you're going to hear a story just as good as the one you've been telling."

Tom rose and went to the door. "Good-evening, Mr. Lincoln."

MAKING GOOD IN THE VILLAGE

"Hello, Tom, glad you're back! You're needed at the store."

"That sounds good. Come in and tell me about it."

Mr. Lincoln strode into the room and immediately became part of the general reunion. "There isn't much to tell," he commenced, "but what there is is good."

"You bet!" exclaimed Guy. "It's the real thing!"

"Go on, let's hear it," urged Tom.

"Well, you know that salesman, Mr. Bagby, from Snare & Tobey promised to get those goods to us in less than two weeks if he could."

"Yes, I remember, but I put it down for talk."

"Well, the whole line of goods was dumped on us in just seven days from the time he took the order."

"That's a record-breaker—a salesman keeping his word is something of a novelty."

"That's what I thought. You know I've got to make you a sort of an apology."

"I guess not, forget it, whatever it is."

"It's this. You remember I didn't exactly like that purchase of yours, that cheap line."

"Yes, I'm not sure I like it myself as much as I thought I did when I ordered the stuff."

THE DECISION

"Wait a bit!" put in Guy excitedly.

"I got to confess," continued Mr. Lincoln, "I got to confess that you were right. It's the biggest business stroke you've made yet."

"I, I—" stammered Tom.

"Never mind," and Mr. Lincoln raised his hand, "listen to my story. I didn't like the stuff when it arrived, but as it was your buy I decided to show the stock at once, and I even went so far as to advertise in the *Eagle*. I just advertised 'lowest prices in town,' and cut under Slocum & Stilwell's figures a cent or so on each article. Well, we've been as busy as a hen on a hot stove ever since."

"I should say so," said Guy. "I've heard more talk in town how our store has beaten Slocum & Stilwell at their own game. It's a great comp."

"But, how about the quality of the line, can we stand back of it?"

Mr. Lincoln hesitated and seemed a little surprised at the question. "Why, I don't know, all I know is we're busy, and folks are congratulating me every day on our having stood up under Slocum's fire."

"How did you advertise the line?"

"Oh, just gave a list of the goods and the cut prices!"

MAKING GOOD IN THE VILLAGE

"Didn't say it was a cheap line at a cheap price?"

"No, didn't say anything."

"Then we're no better than Slocum & Stilwell."

"Why, I thought I was doing exactly what you wanted done. I pushed the whole thing more to please you than anything else. I don't like cheap goods and never did."

"And you sent me out to the hills so I might get a chance to see straight?"

"Yes, yes, but—" and Mr. Lincoln looked at Tom and could say no more. Mrs. Stewart and Mary had been listeners, but had taken no part in the conversation, but now Mrs. Stewart spoke. "Tom, tell Mr. Lincoln about the accident in the rapids."

Mr. Lincoln showed surprise and a little annoyance at a suggestion of this sort coming at what seemed an inopportune moment, but he resigned himself to listen, for he held Mrs. Stewart in high esteem.

Tom told the story well and he quoted from Hiram Johnson as he spoke when he held the broken handle of the paddle in his hand and repeated with all the tenseness of his nature aroused at the recollection, "I bought it at Slocum & Stilwell's. It was cheap, cheap, cheap!"

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"Why, Tom, you didn't feel that way about it when you ordered the new line," said Mary, unable to comprehend the impression the experience in the rapids had made on Tom, "you were proud of what you had done to meet competition, and the way business has improved shows you were right."

"I was wrong no matter how much we sell of the cheap line. It's all right to sell it for what it is, but it's all wrong just to say 'reduced prices,' as though we had cut the price on our standard goods."

"That's what Slocum did," interposed Guy.

"Yes, and I could see it was rotten business when Slocum advertised one thing and sold another, but when I got a chance to do the same thing he was doing, I was blind enough to want to do it."

"Yes," said Mr. Lincoln slowly, "and I could see you were dead wrong then, and I wanted you to get away where you could think it over and find yourself again. And when you were gone I fell into the same trap that had caught you. The minute the goods began to sell I hadn't the courage to tell folks that they weren't our regular stock. Tom, we must find a way out of this, right away, no matter what it costs. You're right and Hiram Johnson was right, now how shall we go about it?"

MAKING GOOD IN THE VILLAGE

"There's only one answer, and I've asked myself your question a hundred times."

"What is it?"

"Sell the goods for just what they are. Tell the people they're not our standard line. Tell them it's a cheap line that they can have at a price, and that's all there is to it."

"Then, Tom, we got to tell them we deceived them in what we've already sold."

"Can't help it, it's got to be done. I can't see how it's going to work, but, somehow, out in the woods there, it seemed clear enough that to tell the truth about the goods was the only way."

"You're right, Tom, it is the only way and we'll do it," and Mr. Lincoln rose to go.

"They'll laugh at you and don't you forget it," said Guy.

"Guess we'll have to stand it, then," said Mr. Lincoln.

"I hate to think of Slocum getting the best of you after all," said Mary, "but I suppose it will pay in the end."

"Sis, I don't care a rap whether it pays or not, ever, but when The Lincoln Hardware Company sells anything it's going to be just what they say it is."

THE DECISION

"We'll shake on that," said Mr. Lincoln, "we're both used to being poor so we can stand it if we lose a little business." The door closed on Mr. Lincoln and left the little family group silently looking at one another.

"There goes your business scoop," commented Guy.

"I hate to see Slocum get ahead of you, Tom, just because he isn't honest," said Mary.

"But you wouldn't like to see me win out against him by using his methods, would you?"

"No, but—"

"Tom," and there was great earnestness in Mrs. Stewart's voice. "You know you are right, and that is enough. You can go ahead now and win your fight and still be a man. I'm proud of you."

CHAPTER XXXIX

JUST AS GOOD

WHEN Tom reached his room that night he found a letter on his bureau from Mr. Fort. Glancing at the postmark he could see that it had arrived two days earlier. Always glad to hear from his friend, he opened the envelope eagerly. He read it through twice. "There, I'm glad he feels that way about it and I'm glad I'd made up my mind before I got it. I'll answer this as soon as we've put the cheap line on its proper basis." The letter read as follows:

DEAR TOM: I was rather disappointed to see your advertisement in Friday's *Eagle*. I know you are having a hard fight of it against Slocum & Stilwell's cheap line of goods, but I know that line well, and also know that no permanent business can be built on such trash. They will be found out sooner or later, and will pay the price that always follows deception. Therefore I was surprised to see you fighting him on his own terms. It is not like you. I think you have been misled or overanxious. I shall be

JUST AS GOOD

glad to hear from you on this matter. If I can help you solve your problem write or wire me, and I will come to you at once.

Stick to your own judgment, which I know to be against the "just as good" brand. This class of goods is the curse of modern business. Leave it alone.

Very sincerely,

FRANK FORT.

Tom did not go to sleep till the small hours of the following morning, and he was up and out of the house and down at the store before anybody else in that house had risen.

He felt himself to be something of a stranger as he approached the front of his place of business. "They've made a fine window display," he admitted, as he glanced from right to left on entering, and when inside, and the lights on, for it was a dull morning, he commented again, "they certainly have made a good display."

He was not long in finding two pieces of heavy, white cardboard each about four feet long by two and a half wide. "They'll do," he remarked, and presently, with a marking pot and brush in hand he stood back and examined his efforts at lettering. The sign read:

MAKING GOOD IN THE VILLAGE

WE HAVE PUT IN A LINE OF CHEAP HARDWARE
TO MEET THE DEMAND FOR CHEAP GOODS.

WE DO NOT RECOMMEND THEM.

WE DO NOT GUARANTEE THEM.

WE DO NOT LIKE TO SELL THEM.

WE THINK STANDARD HARDWARE IS THE ONLY
CHEAP HARDWARE.

WE LIKE TO SELL GOODS WE CAN STAND
BACK OF.

BUT IF PRICE IS THE ONLY CONSIDERATION,
COME IN AND BUY WHAT YOU WANT SO LONG
AS YOU KNOW WHAT YOU ARE BUYING.

CASH RETURNED ON PREVIOUS SALES MADE
FROM THIS STOCK IF GOODS HAVE PROVED UN-
SATISFACTORY.

Tom put one of these placards in each window.
"I hate to do it, but there it is and I feel better about
it. I'll put the same thing in Friday's *Eagle*."

"Hello! Beat me to the store, did you?" and
Tom looked up to see Mr. Lincoln.

"Yep, I couldn't rest till I had this thing straight-
ened out."

"Well, your signs are plain enough; guess every-
body'll know what you're driving at."

"We want them to."

"Yes, but I feel as though we're making a present
of the business to Slocum. Just the same, I'd rather

JUST AS GOOD

let him have it so long as we can't stand back of the goods."

"Here, read this letter from Mr. Fort." Mr. Lincoln read it carefully and handed it back to Tom. "He's right; he can see the situation better because he's outside of it. I'm glad we've stopped; wish we'd not commenced. There'll be a lot of talk."

"We'll have to take punishment, but better now than later."

Mr. Lincoln knew Steubenville well and was not wrong when he prophesied that there would be talk. When the mail was being distributed that morning Martha Acker was at her post as usual and so was Alicia Norton.

"Ain't you seen them signs in The Lincoln Hardware Company's window, Martha?"

"Ain't I seen them? Well, ruther, an' the minute I laid eyes on 'em I hurried round to Slocum & Stilwell's so as to see how it took. I thought at fust he'd be glad to hear 'at they was ashamed o' their own goods, but he took on somethin' turrible when I let on what them signs read."

"What did he say, Martha?"

"Mebbe I hadn't ought to tell, but I reckon I will jest this once."

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"You can tell me, Martha, knowin' as I ain't the kind to spread news around permiscuous. Now what did he say?"

"Oh, he called Tom a fool in seven different ways. Said he was a fool for spoilin' a good thing, an' thet they were both in the same boat when it come to sellin' cheap goods, an' why was he the idiot to tell everybody. Slocum was awful cut up, an' acted thet dreadful as I never seen."

"But, why, Martha, why should he make such a fuss, when it's their own goods Tom an' Jethro is a-runnin' down?"

"It's plain to me as gazin' through a ladder."

"I can't seem to see jest why Slocum should take on so."

"Why, don't you see, he's a-sellin' the same goods an' pretendin' they're all the best, an' now here comes Tom an' Jethro apologizin' for them, an' sayin' they ain't no good, an' here's Slocum who's been sellin' them for months. It don't make Slocum look like no philanthropist, does it?"

"That's so, I see how it's goin' to work, they's goin' to be lots o' trouble for Slocum. Did anybody tell Tom or Jethro how Slocum took it?"

"How could they? I'm the only one that knows."

JUST AS GOOD

"Well, Martha, I'm goin' over to—"

"No, you ain't, I got the information first, an' I'm goin' to tell if anybody does."

"It ain't fair, I thought o' tellin' it to Jethro first."

"I was plannin' to tell it when I met you here, an' it belongs to me to tell it. Didn't I think o' callin' on Slocum the minute I seen them signs in The Lincoln Hardware window?"

"Oh, I suppose you did! But tell me, anyway, how Tom an' Jethro takes it."

"I'll tell you the very first one. I'm goin' over there right away." And Martha, true to her word, was making a professional call on Tom and Jethro inside of two minutes. As Jethro was waiting on a customer, her first attentions were paid to Tom, and she told him all she had found out, as to how Slocum took the news that The Lincoln Hardware Company would not stand back of the cheap line.

"That's so," commented Tom. "I hadn't thought of that. It will put him in an unpleasant position. But I can't help that, this company now and forevermore sells goods for what they are, no more, no less." As he was speaking the telephone rang, and he now excused himself to answer the call. To his surprise

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it was none other than Slocum himself. "This Mr. Stewart?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I've had a look at those signs in your window."

"Yes."

"Don't you think you are making a mistake to deliberately inform people that you have been deceiving them?"

"No, I think the mistake was made in deceiving them in the first place, not in telling them now."

"You're ruining yourself, young man. Take the advice of an older man who has been in the business all his life."

"That's what I'm doing."

"What?"

"I'm taking Mr. Fort's advice. I'm going to sell goods for just what they are."

"You're going head on for the rocks."

"Tell me this, Mr. Slocum, why are you so suddenly interested in my business success?"

"You're a fool!" came back the answer, and Tom heard the receiver hung up. Then he turned again to Martha Acker.

"He don't rightly like it," said she.

"Who?" asked Tom.

JUST AS GOOD

"Why, Mr. Slocum, you just been talking to. I heard what you said an' guessed what he said. He don't rightly like it that you're showin' him up."

"No, I'm not."

"Yes, you are, when you tell the people your line ain't no good, you tell them his is just as bad, only he's sellin' it as though it was first-class."

"Well, I can't help it, Martha. Only, you won't tell anybody about this conversation now, will you?"

"You can trust me, Mr. Stewart. I ain't that kind."

In about two minutes more she was in close consultation with Alicia, and it was to be regretted that somehow the news did leak out, that Mr. Slocum was very much concerned that The Lincoln Hardware Company had chosen to tell the public that the new cheap line was cheap all the way through. It took but a few days for all Steubenville to learn that Mr. Slocum felt very much concerned that Tom had spoken so plainly about his own cheap goods. This had one immediate effect. It made every purchaser of that line of goods feel that he had a personal grievance against Slocum & Stilwell and, though this had not been Tom's intention, the result of his stand in taking the public into his confidence was that, so

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far as this fight with Slocum & Stilwell was concerned, he had won a complete victory.

The next issue of the *Eagle* contained Tom's announcement very much in the same words as on his placards in his show windows, but by that time it was stale news, for all Steubenville knew about it and had passed its judgment in favor of The Lincoln Hardware Company and against Slocum & Stilwell. There was, however, one direct response to this advertisement, and it came in the shape of a telegram, which read:

Good for you, Tom. Now you're on the straight road to real business success.

FRANK FORT.
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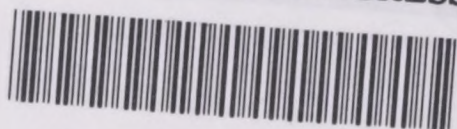
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